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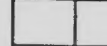
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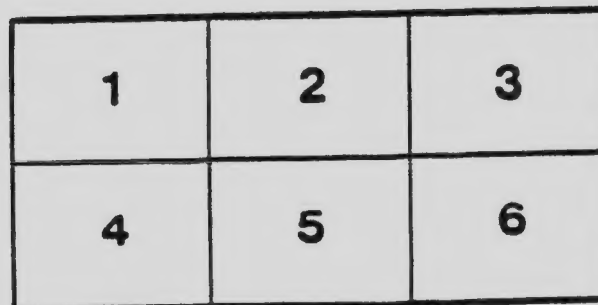
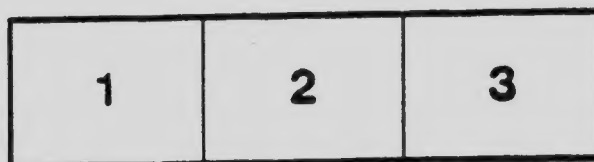
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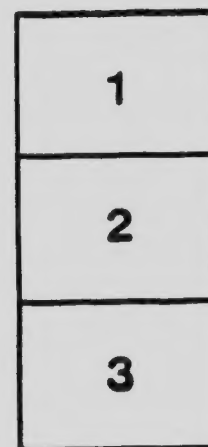
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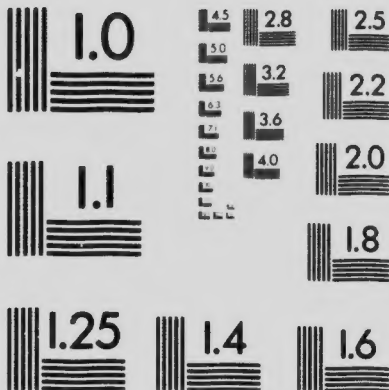
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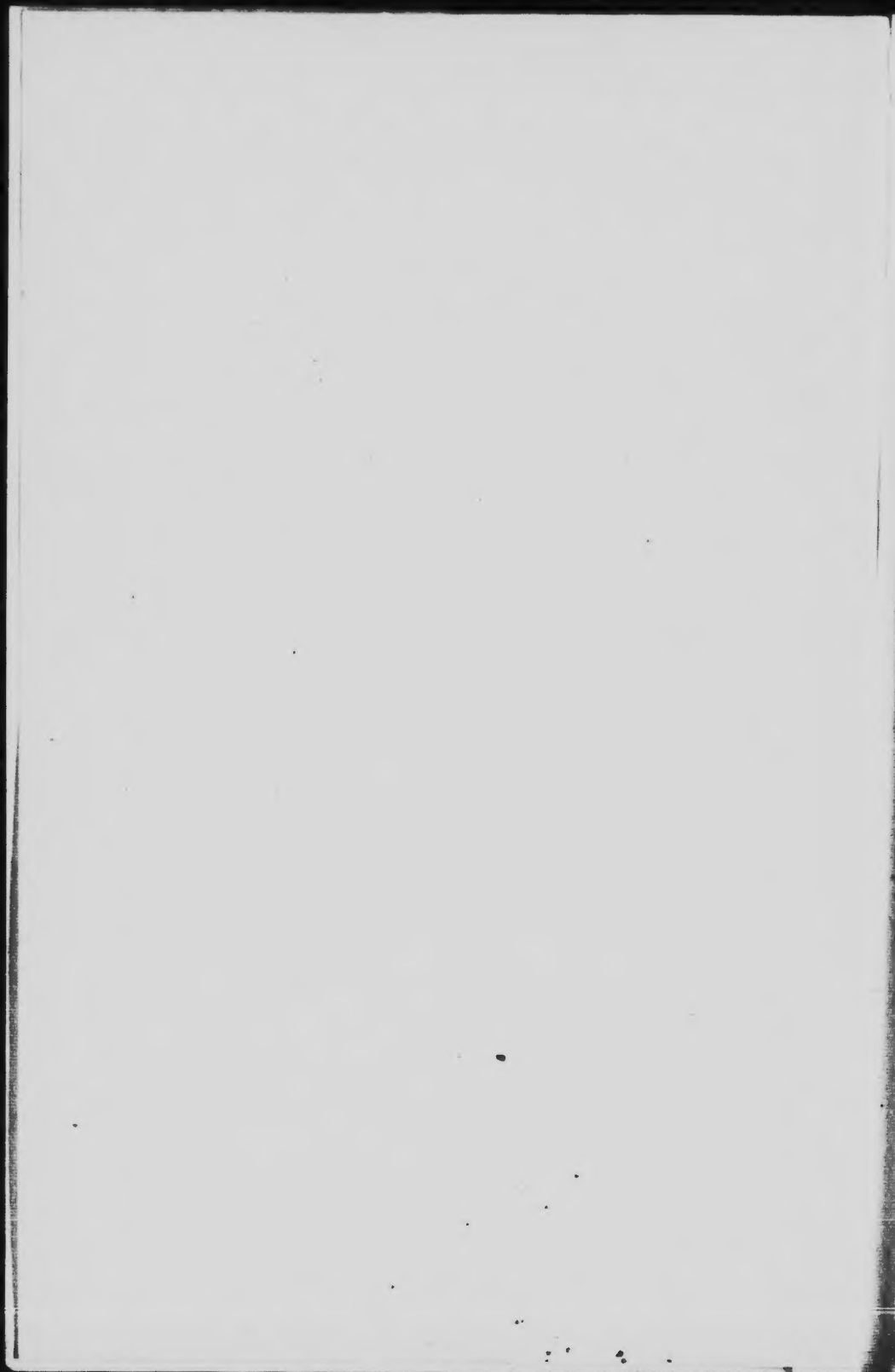
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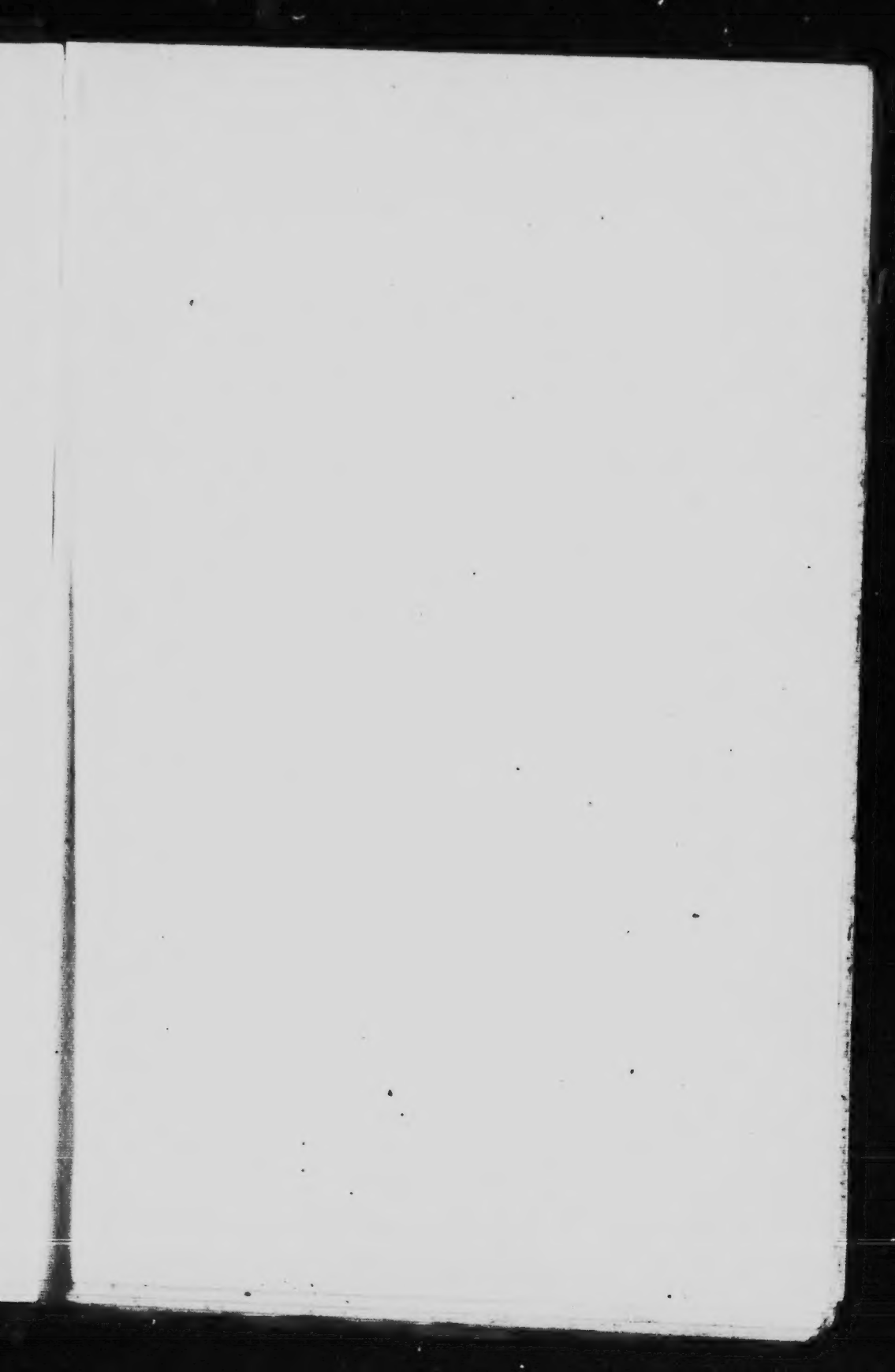
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Roland
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Roland *of* Altenburg

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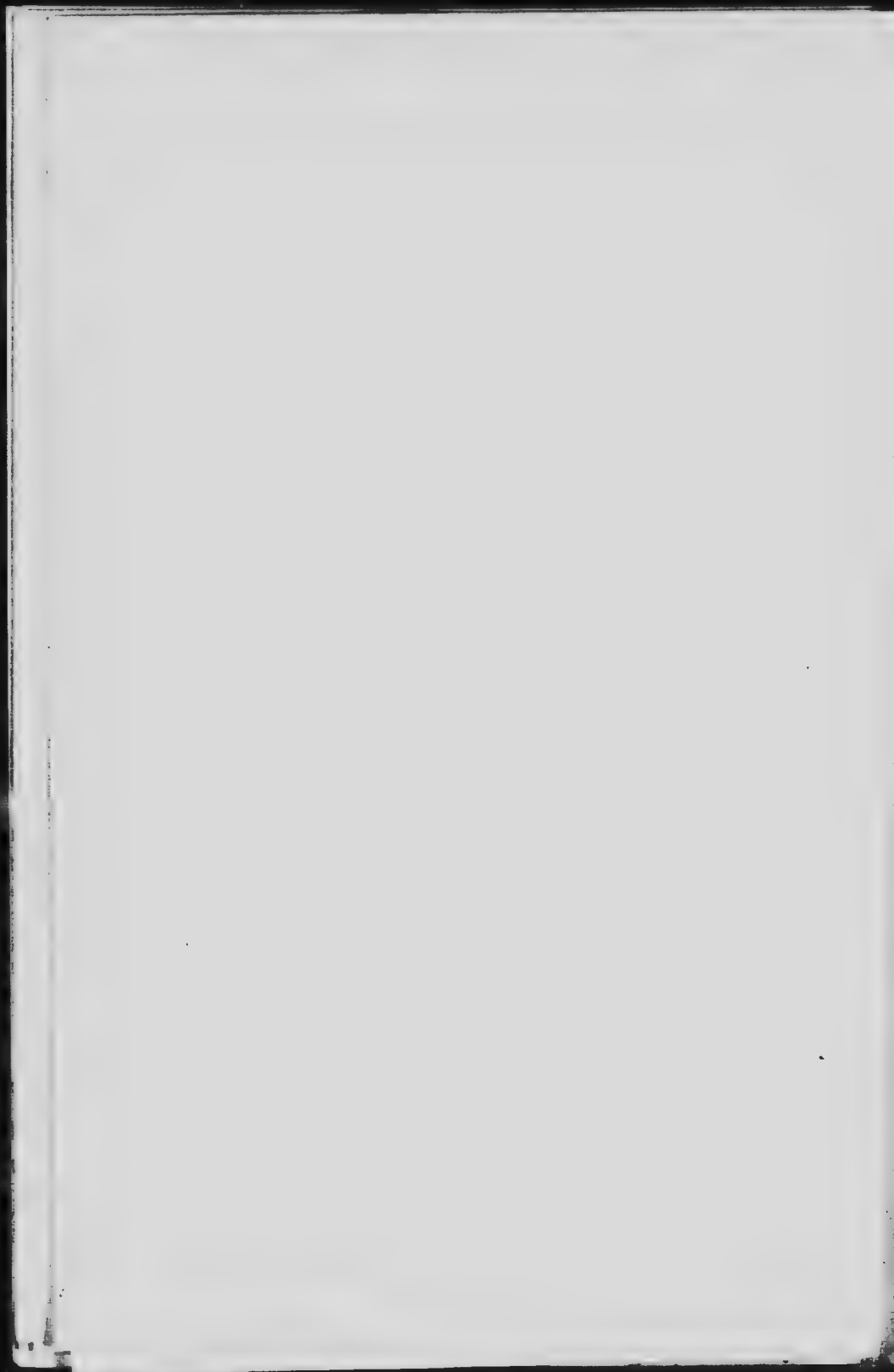
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Roland *of* Altenburg

I

The Departure of the Crown Prince

THE Crown Prince of Altenburg was driving down Fifth Avenue in a hansom cab. No one who had known him when he was hedged in by ceremony and hidden by retainers would have suspected that he could successfully masquerade in a gray tweed suit and a straw hat as an American citizen. No suggestion of royalty hung about him—there was no hint that for hundreds of years his ancestors had worn the purple, that he himself was heir to the Prince of Altenburg, ruler of a nation. To the uninitiated he was merely a good-looking young American, erect and well-built.

Beside him sat a man of middle age, Karl von Meyer, Colonel of the House-

hold Guard. Rotund and jovial as he was, his natural cheeriness seemed at the moment a trifle shadowed. Both he and Prince Roland gazed dejectedly upon the animated scene about them, and for a time neither spoke.

"This is the moment I have dreaded for six splendid months," Roland said at length. "We've been in heaven, Karl, and now to go home——"

"Come, come, my boy, it isn't so bad as that," put in the Colonel, trying rather wearily to buoy up his own spirits.

"But it is—it is hell," said the Prince, with somber emphasis.

"This sounds very much like treason," exclaimed the Colonel with a laugh.

"Oh, you understand." The Prince put his hand impulsively, affectionately on the older man's arm. "You know how they tie me down in Altenburg. This journey with you has been a glimpse of freedom."

"You have been seeing the world, my boy. But you cannot go on traveling for-

ever. You ought to be satisfied with this."

"Satisfied!" he exclaimed. "This one little breath of fresh air fills me with longing. After the life in the open, the musty ceremonies of Altenburg will be more unbearable than ever. You know yourself that I cannot even cough at court without fear of setting a fashion. I cannot move except with all the world looking on. If I were ever indiscreet enough to show an emotion, the crowd would echo it to the ends of the land. The humblest bootblack in New York is freer than such a figure-head as I in an old-fogey European court."

"It is as his royal highness, your uncle, warned you," the Colonel replied seriously. "He was afraid this journey would make you restless, but he was generous and let you go when he found your heart was set upon it. You must not forget that. The last words he said to me were, 'Give the lad his head. Let him go where he pleases and do what he

pleases, but let him never forget the word duty.' Have I failed?"

"Certainly not, my dear Karl," said the Prince affectionately. "I shall, of course, do what is expected of me—only," a little wistfully, "it will be harder."

Von Meyer laughed in an effort to relieve the strain. "His royal highness also warned me not to let you fall in love," he said. "At least I've kept my promise on that point."

"There is not the least doubt of that," Roland answered.

The two men relapsed into a silence which was only broken now and then by a sigh. As the cab approached Washington Square, the Prince became conscious of a disturbance half a block away. He was not alone in his curiosity, for everybody on the street was watching a great red automobile, which seemed to be an eccentric runaway. It was evident that something was vitally wrong with the monster, for it was describing circles, narrowly missing the stone curbing at

each approach. The crowd stood silent and inert. No one made a move to assist the two women who were alone in the car. Roland wondered what kind of men they were who could remain quiescent in such an emergency. As his cab drew nearer he saw that one of the two was young and pretty. Then he looked at the other, who was acting as chauffeuse, and he could see nothing else. With a little, half-amused smile she was trying to pacify the frightened automobile. For an instant the Prince sat watching her in a kind of trance. Then he gathered himself together, stopped the cab and jumped to the street before the Colonel knew he had moved. With the certainty of sacrificing his dignity and at the risk of losing his royal life, Roland studied his chance and leaped aboard the maddened machine.

Seizing the steering wheel from the clutch of the chauffeuse, he cried, "Your foot, if you please; lift your foot." At the same moment he stopped the spark.

The automobile, feeling a new hand at the helm, gave a few refractory snorts, made a tangent dash of a few yards, and came to a shuddering stop.

"I hope you are not hurt," Roland said simply, as he helped the women to alight.

"Thank you, no. It was too absurd." And the girl who had acted as chauffeuse looked confused for the first time.

"You will take my cab," said the Prince, leading them toward the vehicle in which von Meyer was impatiently looking at his watch.

"The Deutschland sails in twenty minutes," warned the Colonel, with singular lack of gallantry. "We have no time to lose."

"I understand," said Roland, a hard tone in his voice. "Will you please give your place to the ladies?"

The Colonel rose reluctantly, but the young women remonstrated.

"Please don't. We can easily find another cab," said the taller girl, turning a

troubled face toward Roland. "I am afraid you will miss your boat. We are too grateful for what you have done for us to put you to any more inconvenience. You must not wait on our account. Do hurry, I beg of you."

Roland looked down at the girl's distress and within him he felt something tighten. "Perhaps it would be better to find another cab," he said quietly. "Keep this one, Karl. Go on ahead and see about the luggage. I will follow."

"But I protest," said the Colonel. "You'll miss the boat."

"I insist," commanded the Prince.

The Colonel resumed his place in the cab and the young women wondered at his obedience to the orders of the other. Something of deference in the attitude of the older man, something of confidence in the tone of the speaker made them curious.

"I shall be there in time," Roland said as the Colonel left him. Finding an opportune cabman at his elbow, he

ordered a carriage and asked the women where they wished to be driven.

"To the Waldorf, please. We can send for the machine from there. Thank you again." And they drove off, leaving the Crown Prince of Altenburg alone on the curb. For a moment he stood there dazed and disconcerted. But the good-natured smiles of the bystanders broke into his reverie and he flushed and turned away.

A cabman who had been a part of the crowd offered to take the Prince to the boat on time or give up his pay, and Roland accepted the bargain. He turned to a policeman who had just come up. "Officer, the machine will be sent for at once."

On the way to the pier he wondered what had prompted him to carry his gallantry so far as to risk missing the steamer. "It was worth it, though," he mused, and smiled at the picture he had made on the curbstone when he had been dismissed so unceremoniously. "One

always finds the most amusing things to do as the holiday is ending," he said audibly. "Why couldn't this have happened weeks ago instead of now when it is too late? I wonder who she is. It would be rather pleasant to know her name."

The carriage lurched violently and the Prince called hotly to the driver, "You needn't kill your horse, man. It isn't a matter of life and death."

"I'll have you there on time, sir," replied the cabman.

Roland resumed his seat muttering, "Of course you'll have me there on time when I'm half inclined to be left."

The horse plunged onward, but the nearer the cab drew to the dock the less anxious Roland felt to reach it. Suddenly the note of a great, deep whistle sounded and Roland saw the monstrous bulk of the inexorable steamer.

"We'll make it, sir," cried the cabman jubilantly, giving a final crack of the whip.

All was flurry and fluster. The last of the stay-at-homes were hurrying off the ship, farewells were being waved and the sailors were at their posts ready to haul in the hawsers when they were cast off. Roland saw von Meyer at the rail gazing intently into the crowd, and he tried unaccountably to avoid the Colonel's gaze.

"Oh, if that cabby had only missed the boat!" he said to himself. The final whistle interrupted his musings, sounding prolonged and deafening.

"Let go your forward line there!" roared an officer, when it ceased.

Farewells were said again. Handkerchiefs and hats waved wildly on the ship and on the pier. Colonel von Meyer rushed about in impotent excitement, and Roland, standing with the crowd on the dock, watched the great vessel until it swung slowly into the stream. But he scarcely heard the cheers and farewells. He saw the vanishing steamer only in a dream. The brain of the Crown Prince of Altenburg was unconsciously, involun-

tarily busy with a fantasy, in which figured a charming face, a maddening smile.

"I'm a fool," he said at length, rousing himself. "This would make a pretty sensation at home if it were known. But it is done now. I must face it out."

II

The Quest Begins

ROLAND Alexander Friedrich, Crown Prince of the Grand Duchy of Altenburg, Prince of the Holy Roman Empire, Baron von Hochfels, Duke of Melita, Count of Pilitz, Honorary Colonel of the 24th Altenburg Hussars, etc., etc., etc., was twenty-six years of age. His uncle, the reigning prince, had no son, and at the death of his father, fifteen years before, Roland was formally proclaimed heir to the throne. Brought up under the strict supervision of old Prince Ludwig, the boy's youth had been a lonely one. Between the functions of state at which his presence was required, and the solitary studies which were exacting and continuous, he had never associated with boys of his age, and his only friends were nobles of the court, oppressed with a sense of their own dignity, and officers of

the household guard. His childish curiosity was left ungratified, his boyish enthusiasms were stifled. He was guarded with a certain polite rigidity, and watched lest some dash of individuality should impertinently make itself evident. Often he cast wistful and envious glances at boys who stopped on the roadside to doff their caps as he rode by in state, but his tutors never permitted him to forget his exalted station. They were too obviously conscious that the time when he was to ascend the throne was not so far away but that his every moment must be spent in preparation.

At the age of fifteen Roland was betrothed to the little Princess Theresa of Felzenbruck, the neighboring province. The two had not met since they entered their teens, but an alliance was so obviously desirable to the two nations that there was no thought of protest. Roland knew well the meaning of the word duty, and it would be as pleasant to marry his gay little cousin as to go through any

other ceremony in his circumscribed life. After the betrothal, the two exchanged occasional formal letters, and Roland's gifts to the Princess—always chosen by Prince Ludwig—were many and valuable. But after a time the letters were written less frequently, and eventually they stopped altogether.

The Prince continued his studies with sincerity, if not with enthusiasm. His recreations consisted in studying public and private reforms. As he grew older, he began to have but little regard for precedent and sought information from every possible source concerning means by which the welfare of his country might be furthered. A certain originality in him would have its way in spite of restrictions. Personally Roland was the idol of his country, but it gave him little comfort and no companionship. Ludwig was aging rapidly, and the boy realized that soon he would be bound to Altenburg for all time. His year at Heidelberg made him restless, and when it was ended he

felt that he faced his last chance to get a breath of fresh air. He wanted to see the world, to learn how other people lived, and for the moment to lead a different life himself. He conceived the idea of going to the United States incognito, although so radical a performance terrified the old Prince and the counselors of the court. But Roland insisted that the journey was necessary to his education, and his pleading finally won the day.

Karl von Meyer, the boy's best friend, the only one who understood him, was selected to act as guide, and the old Colonel was eager for the adventure. To further his plans for secrecy, Roland gave out information that he was to travel incognito in China, Japan and eastern countries. Then the two slipped out of Oberholtz, and, the Prince in the guise of a private citizen and von Meyer as a German merchant, they crossed the ocean to New York.

Ludwig and his counselors were kept informed of the Prince's movements, but

the truth never reached the public. There was much speculation about Roland's adventures, and rumors of exciting exploits traveled through the newspapers. At one time he was reported to be in Calcutta, again in Palestine, and once an interview with a potentate of the far east was supposed to have averted a war. The Prince, traveling in America as Mr. Donald Scott, smiled as he read these telegrams.

Roland had adopted the name of Scott for no other reason than because it was short, easily remembered, and written with slight effort. Then, too, he had reveled as a boy in the works of the sage of Abbotsford, whose heroes were more alive to him than his best friends. Donald was, of course, suggested by his own name. Every precaution was taken to prevent discovery. His luggage was marked with his new name, and his mail was addressed in that way. An English tutor had made him familiar with the language, and during his six months'

tour he perfected his idioms until his speech bore not the slightest evidence of foreign birth.

When the Prince turned away from the pier of the Deutschland, he began to realize the peculiarities of the situation. It seemed a little ridiculous even to himself—fortunately the only person who knew the circumstances. It was too humiliating to have lost his head over an American girl whom he had seen only for a moment,—one who had left him as unceremoniously as if he had been a policeman who had helped her at a crossing. To her he was but one of the curious crowd of street loiterers who had seen the episode of the automobile. She had already forgotten him while he was searching for her blindly and without clues. He thought of the trick he had played von Meyer, and would have given anything if the Colonel had stayed with him. But it was too late to be sensible, and he consoled himself by sending a wireless message to his friend.

"Karl von Meyer, S. S. Deutschland at sea: Missed boat. Await me at Cherbourg. Sailing on first steamer. Bon voyage."

"Poor old Karl!" He smiled as the humor of the situation came to him. "I wish him joy on his lonely journey."

As he left the building, he almost ran into a man who had stepped into his pathway crying, "Cab, sir?" The cabman drew back a few paces and looked at Roland in astonishment. It is not common for princes to feel abashed before cab drivers, but Roland was for the instant flurried.

"You couldn't 'a' missed the boat, sir," said the man. The cabman was evidently disturbed over the wild ride he had taken for nothing.

"You're not to blame," said the Prince apologetically. "You brought me here on time. You see I remembered some very important business. You may take me back to the Waldorf."

After Roland had explained to the

hotel clerk and a few chance acquaintances that he had missed the boat for Europe, and stopped those of the trunks which were to have followed on the next steamer, he started out aimlessly to find some trace of the unknown. Feeling like a fool all the time, he yet found in himself a curious obstinacy, an inexplicable persistence. The girl's face haunted him and he felt he must see her again. He pulled himself up and wondered what new sensation had possessed him. He had never before hesitated to follow the rational course when it became evident. But he finally gave up trying to justify himself. After all, it was only a harmless adventure and he meant to enjoy it.

The big red automobile had disappeared from Washington Square, and inquiries failed to throw any light upon the identity of the owner. A tour of the neighboring repair shops produced as small an effect. It began to seem a hopeless quest, and after searching all the

afternoon, Roland returned dejected to the hotel, with a very poor opinion of himself. Yet there was some witchery in the girl which he could not shake out of his mind. He told himself that she was no more beautiful than others whom he had seen in the west and south, and he wondered what there was in her smile that it should persist in following him. He had forgotten other troublesome smiles easily enough. Doubtless to-morrow he would forget this.

In the evening he went to the opera and scanned the boxes with his glasses in the faint hope of finding the face that bothered him. He was disappointed, and returned to the hotel in a mood of discouragement.

Roland slept soundly that night, but he woke in the morning with the feeling that something was on his mind. When it came back into his consciousness he found that the night had not solved his difficulty. At breakfast he remembered the newspapers and sent the waiter for

copies of all of them. For two hours he delved among the columns unavailingly. The incident of the red automobile had escaped the reporters. Then Roland said uncomplimentary things about American journalism. He fulfilled in his native language and took a walk through the park. Not a carriage escaped him. He eagerly watched each one as it approached and felt the same sickening sense of disappointment as it rolled past. Two or three times he was sure that he saw the big red automobile whirling around a bend, but in each instance he was wrong. Throughout the morning Roland walked the streets of New York, impatient and wretched. To be baffled is to be expectant. The very elusiveness of the girl made her desirable. The chagrin of a particularly foolish failure made him the more determined to succeed. Yet he could not endure his own ridicule, and in a moment of despair he engaged passage on the New York for the following day.

Having settled the thing, he had peace for an hour or two. He tried to laugh the matter off and sought diversion in the café of the hotel. For a time he was almost happy. He would soon be back in Altenburg and the nameless beauty in New York would be forgotten. Then he overheard two men at the next table discussing automobiles and the mania was again upon him, quite as though the question were still open. "Up to this moment," he thought, "I have only made a partial fool of myself, but to return home unsatisfied would be too complete a failure."

He resolved to see the girl in spite of fate. If he should stop now, after letting von Meyer sail away alone, he would deserve to be a prisoner in Altenburg for the rest of his days.

Once more in his room, it suddenly occurred to him that some one might have noticed the number of the automobile, and he wondered that he had not thought of it before. "Boy," he said to

the lad who answered the call, "I want you to find me the cabman who took me to the boat the other day. He is stationed at Washington Square. Ask for the driver who drove Mr. Scott on Saturday to the Deutschland's pier."

While the boy was away Roland tried to quiet himself with some magazines, but he could not keep his turbulent mind upon them. The excitement of the chase was too much for his boasted self-control. About half an hour had passed when there was a knock at the door and the cabman entered.

"Ah," said the Prince. "I want to talk to you for a few minutes. Do you know the name of the owner of the automobile we saw the other day?"

"No, sir," replied the man. "I supposed the ladies were friends of yours. I thought you knew 'em all along."

"Well, I don't, but I want to. That is, I want to buy a machine like theirs. You don't happen to remember the make, do you, or the number?"

"I don't know the make, but the number on the back was 917."

"You are sure?"

"Yes, sir," said the cabman, "I remember it well."

"That is all, then. Thank you." And the Jehu bowed his way out, pocketing a crisp bill.

When he was gone, Roland felt a sense of relief that he had not known since the search began. He at last held the key to the mystery. The rest would be easy.

III

Mr. Stanley Lockwood

THE Prince awoke at daylight after a night of dreams. At first he had seemed to be in a yawl, frantically trying to overtake a disappearing ocean liner, from the stern of which a beautiful American girl was signaling to him. Then Karl von Meyer had appeared in a frightful vision. And at eccentric intervals the Prince was in an automobile which refused to move. It seemed to him that he could start the machinery if he only knew the number. Finally he remembered 917, and in the joy of the thought he awoke.

While Roland was at breakfast, one of the clerks was engaged in trying to discover the name of the owner of "Automobile No. 917," and at length appeared with a card which read, "917, Mr. Stanley Lockwood; residence, West 57th St.; business address, Empire Building."

"Her father probably," he thought to himself, and then repeated the name, Miss Lockwood, several times. "I wonder what her first name is."

He soon found a social register at the desk and looked up Mr. Lockwood. "Ah, here it is," he exclaimed eagerly. "'Lockwood, Mr. Stanley—K. Un. R. Ss. Ny. Mt. Pl. TF. Cy. Sc. Snc. Jkl. H. '94, W. 57.' But where is Mary or Susan or whatever they call his daughter?"

The hotel clerk explained that Mr. Lockwood was the son of General Lockwood, and a well-known young man in society.

"Then she isn't Miss Lockwood after all," said Roland unconsciously.

"I'm afraid not," replied the clerk with a smile. The Prince left the hotel and drove down town. At the Empire Building he had no difficulty in finding the office, but it was not so easy to secure admittance. After enduring the inspection of office-boys and clerks, he finally reached Mr. Lockwood's outer office.

"What is the nature of your business, Mr. Scott?" asked the secretary as he scrutinized the card.

"It is—well, it is in regard to automobiles," the Prince replied, somewhat perplexed. He was not prepared for the question.

"I am very sorry to say that Mr. Lockwood has instructed me not to admit any more automobile agents. He really isn't in the market at present." And the secretary moved toward the door.

"Take my card to Mr. Lockwood," said the Prince with an air of authority. "I have business with him which I do not care to explain to any one else."

The tone of his voice was not to be questioned. It moved the secretary to courtesy. Without further hesitation he showed him into the inner office where Mr. Lockwood was examining his mail. He was not more than thirty, and sufficiently well-built, but the Prince did not like him. He was quite sure of that on the instant.

His card was presented by the secretary with a word or two of explanation. Lockwood looked up with a supercilious expression, which faded a little at sight of the stalwart figure within the doorway.

"Ah, Mr. Scott," he said in a cold voice and with a note of interrogation, "you are interested in automobiles, I believe."

"To a certain degree," answered Roland, very erect in his chair. "I happened to see an accident to your machine the other day, and I was curious about the cause of it. I have been investigating different makes and wondered whether you had had much trouble with yours. Does it often take the bit in its teeth in that way?"

"Not at all," Lockwood replied. "You would be quite safe in buying one like it. I have tried half a dozen different makes, and this is the best I've found yet."

Roland had inadvertently hit upon one of his fads and felt the danger of an inundation. He took him up quickly and tried to avert it. "Yet the ladies seemed

to be having a good deal of trouble with the levers," he said, and hoped the name he wanted might be mentioned.

"They were foolish to try to run it," exclaimed Lockwood with some heat. "I have told them repeatedly to take the chauffeur, but they are headstrong and think they know it all."

He dared to be familiar with that radiant creature, yet he could speak of her patronizingly. Roland marveled at him. To gain time he ventured an excuse. For any other reason he would have scorned to defend her to such a man. "Perhaps it was merely a lack of experience. The ladies did not seem to be greatly disturbed by the accident."

Lockwood's patronage increased to irony. "It's a poor time to lose your nerve," he said with an unpleasant curve of the lips, "with a foot on the speed pedal and a hand working the brake."

Roland would have enjoyed hitting him. But in default of an excuse, the

moment's silence became awkward. He grasped at a straw. "Then you thoroughly endorse the machine?" he asked.

"Absolutely." Lockwood glanced at him keenly. He had not reached his present position without some knowledge of men and motives. "By Jove!" he said, "you must be the man who helped them out of the fix."

"I was fortunate enough," said the Prince stiffly, "to be driving by at the time."

"I am glad you came in." There was more cordiality in Lockwood's manner, but he could not entirely rid it of a certain distrust. "The ladies were regretting that they had hardly thanked you."

"It was nothing, I assure you. Their thanks were more than adequate." He seemed to be no nearer his object than at first. He had never felt so impotent. "I hope," he added, with another effort to reach the heart of the subject, "that they have quite recovered from the excitement."

"It would take more than a cranky automobile," said Lockwood, rising as if to close the interview, "to frighten Miss Barrington."

Roland gave a little gasp of joy when he heard the name, and Lockwood, visibly annoyed, moved toward the door. Then the thought came to the Prince that this might be the other girl. It was too horrible to go on through the years thinking of the right girl under the wrong name. Lockwood was clearly showing him out and Roland despaired. He hesitated an instant with his hand on the door, and asked as a last hope, "It was she, of course, who ran the machine?"

Lockwood's eyes narrowed into an expression that Roland disliked. It was evident that his mood was not a pleasant one. "It was," he replied coldly. "But, to be frank with you, sir," Lockwood went on, "I don't see what business it is of yours."

Roland smiled a little. "I suppose it is

none of my business, but I came here to find out the lady's name. And you obligingly told it to me. That is all."

The Prince's composure ruffled Lockwood. He retorted in a heat. "Well, I like your nerve. You are going a little too far. A trumpety bit of assistance is not taken advantage of among gentlemen. In New York we do that sort of thing as a matter of course." He waved his hand in an insolent gesture.

Roland answered in his most suave manner, "On the whole, I prefer the gratitude of the ladies. I shall inquire in person after their health."

"Miss Barrington would consider any inquiry an impertinence. I can speak for her."

"That will be unnecessary," said Roland quietly. "I shall make my own inquiries. It will at least give me an opportunity to congratulate her upon her defender."

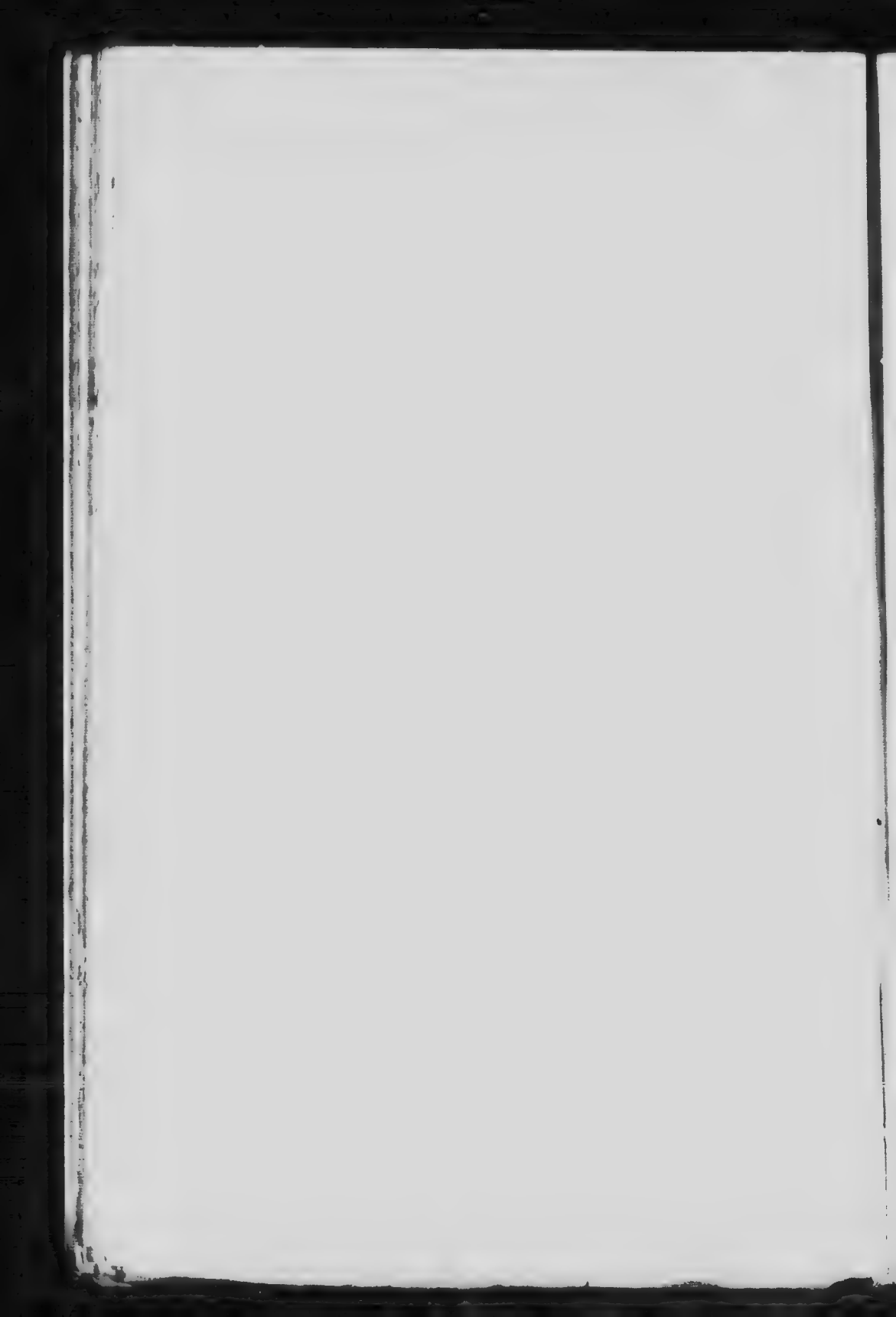
Lockwood clenched his fist and shook it menacingly at the Prince. "I won't have

you calling on her," he said in a rage. "Do you hear?"

Roland was calm in the midst of turbulence. "You have no right," he said, "to give me orders. It is an agreeable novelty to listen to them."

"Well, I have the right to give orders to Miss Barrington," he retorted, with an air of defiance. "Now that you have learned her name, perhaps it may interest you to know that I intend to marry her."

Roland bowed very low. "I am delighted to hear it," he said. "With you to protect her, she will never again be in need of my assistance." He opened the door and went out with the bearing of a soldier.



IV

The Prodigal's Return

THE Crown Prince of Altenburg was unconscious of everything until he found himself on the sidewalk. He had missed the steamer and wounded the feelings of his best friend. He had made a fool of himself over a girl only to find that she was engaged to be married. He was thankful that no one was there to contemplate his folly. "I am an ass," he muttered, and as no arguments to the contrary presented themselves, he accepted the conclusion as final. His one thought was to return to Altenburg on the first boat. The steamship offices were but a short distance away, and half dazed he entered the first of them. "When does the first boat sail?" he asked. "Where are you going?" the clerk demanded.

"Europe, of course." Roland was in no mood to be joked with.

"You'll have to ask next-door. Our boats only go as far as Fall River."

Once more on Broadway, the Prince paused to collect his thoughts. "For three days," he said, "I have been wandering about like a cheerful idiot, the laughing-stock of every one, including myself. Evidently I need a guardian."

The steamer he had intended to take had sailed early that day, but another one was scheduled for two days later, and Roland secured a cabin and returned to the hotel. Shutting himself in his room, he ordered a large drink and a dozen newspapers and magazines. Then he made a resolve.

"I shall stay here until sailing time. Then I shall have myself personally conducted to the boat and locked in the cabin. There must be no chance of escape this time."

He was glad that Karl was not there to laugh at him. At least his discomfiture

was known only to himself. It was quite bad enough as it was and it left him depressed. He tried to read, but the unpleasant vision of Lockwood obscured the page. He wondered why the perversity of things had brought such a man into the situation. He told himself it was right that the girl should be engaged. He was sure he would not have minded at all if only the fellow had been a gentleman instead of an unspeakable cad. There was only one way out of it—to forget her. Dreams of a Mrs. Lockwood were too impossible.

As he restlessly turned the pages of the Herald, his eye caught one word which stood out as if printed in very large type—BARRINGTON. It was in the society column, and the paragraph read as follows:

"Mr. and Mrs. Archibald Taylor will give a dinner at Sherry's this evening in honor of Miss Katherine Barrington and Mr. Stanley Lockwood. Madame Melba will sing."

"Katherine, Katherine, Katherine," the Prince said over and over to himself, "Katherine Barrington."

Then he sent for the social register and found the names "Mr. and Mrs. Porter Barrington, Miss Katherine Barrington, Madison Ave." Going to the desk, he began to write, but three times he tore up the note and began again. It took him half an hour to finish the letter and call a messenger. It was only after the boy had departed that he remembered his resolve, not yet an hour old, with a sense of guilt. But it was easy enough to justify himself. He had missed his steamer in order to see Miss Barrington, and it seemed absurd to allow her engagement to make a difference. She would hardly ignore his note, he thought; in any case he would have the satisfaction of knowing that he had done his best. Besides, in this case it was clearly his duty to show Lockwood that he was not so easily cowed. He had taken the plunge now in any case, and it quieted

him. He picked up one of the discarded magazines and found it satisfying. The restlessness was gone.

At length the boy returned with a note, the contents of which made the Crown Prince of Altenburg feel like shouting for joy. He alternately whistled and sang for the next half-hour.

Suddenly the door opened and Karl von Meyer, Colonel of the Household Guard of Altenburg, stood before him. The Prince gasped as if he had seen a ghost, but the reality of his visitor was evident when he placed a battered straw hat on the table and said with resentful emphasis, "You couldn't lose me."

Roland laughed his boyish laugh, and his joy in the return of his friend was so genuine that Karl's anger soon disappeared.

"Where did you come from and how did you get here?" Roland asked after a moment.

"I could never go back without you. I could not look your uncle in the face.

When the boat started and I saw you were not there, I begged the captain to put me off—I told him who you were. But he wouldn't—the hound. He said I could go back with the pilot if I dared. If I dared—ha!—I would have swum before going on alone."

"Good old Karl!"

"But wait!" the Colonel continued excitedly. "I have only begun. Well, about evening they tied a rope about my waist and let me down into a little ship with the pilot. The waves were like mountains, and there we tossed about all night. I supposed they would go back at once, but it seemed that we had to wait 'to take in the Cedric.'"

Roland put his hand affectionately on his shoulder. "Poor Karl!" he said.

The Colonel's excitement was not easily soothed. He hurried on. "I offered money which I didn't have; it was in my trunk on the steamer. But it was no use. We rolled and rolled, and I thought I should die. Finally a steamer

almost ran us down. Then—another rope and the pilot and I were on the Cedric. Then they quarantined us and put us through the custom-house. And now, *Gott sei gedankt, hier bin ich!*"

With a sigh of relief the Colonel threw himself into a big, comfortable chair, his excitement vanishing. Roland stood over him, to sympathize with his friend. 'It was bully of you, Karl,' he said, "after I had played you such a trick, too. But I've needed you badly. I believe it is only you who has kept me all these years from making an ass of myself."

Something serious in Roland's voice moistened the older man's eyes. "Ah, Roland, Roland," he said gently, "I've never a fear of you. It's the old that are foolish in this world. The young are wise enough to forget the wisdom of their elders." There was a moment's pause before he brought himself up cheerily. "But what have you been doing, my boy, while the cat was away? Come, confess. Tell me all about it."

Roland looked at his watch and grew instantly restless. "I'll tell you the whole story, Karl, at dinner. In the meantime, make yourself comfortable."

"And where are you going now?"

There was a perceptible hesitation before the Prince answered. "You remember the young lady in the red automobile? She has asked me to take tea with her."

The only reply as he went out was a groan from the Colonel.

V

Miss Katherine Barrington

THE prince of romance never loses his self-confidence, but Roland was very modern, and at times painfully human. As he drove up the avenue and finally stopped before an arched entrance of gray stone, he could not control an inward quaking. Under an appearance of composure, he speculated about what he could possibly say to so splendid a creature, fearing a little that he might not carry off the situation. He wondered idly if the field of battle would not be a much lighter test of courage than this, and it was the daring of a soldier that he finally called to his aid as he rang the bell. The servant took his card and showed him into the drawing-room. There was something restful in the space of the big apartment that quieted him for a moment but when

he heard the rustle of a gown and Miss Barrington entered, her dark eyes gleaming, her red-gold hair massed high, that strange sensation again swept over him. She gave him her hand quite frankly and he felt as though he had known her for years. His confidence returned.

"It is good of you to come," she said. "My cousin and I have been feeling that we were curt the other day. It was inexcusable after what you had done. Did you realize how grateful we really were?"

"You were much too grateful, Miss Barrington," he answered. "It did not deserve a thought. Any man would have done it."

"But any man didn't," she laughed. "And there were several others who stood around and watched us."

Roland looked at her. "They were too much absorbed in watching you, I fancy, to think of your peril."

She resented the compliment obviously. A certain coldness crept into her manner as she said, "It was fortunate that you

thought of it. My father would like to thank you."

They sat down, she on a sofa behind a little table, he on a straight chair near by. He leaned toward her rather abruptly and said, "Miss Barrington, I did not come here for thanks. I will not have you think that I estimated that petty service as anything at all. I have rejoiced in it ever since, but not for that."

"It is generous in you to rejoice," she said in an effort to change the drift of a conversation that threatened personalities, "when we made you miss the steamer. I hope it was not altogether our fault."

"It was entirely your fault," said Roland slowly, his eyes upon hers.

Miss Barrington was surprised. She showed it. Yet she expressed only the conventional regret. "I am so sorry," she said a little stiffly. "How can you forgive us?"

"Too easily," he answered. "I reached the dock in time. It was not that."

"And you changed your mind at the last moment?" she asked.

"Yes," he said, "I changed my mind."

She took alarm. There was a startled look in her eyes and she was obviously relieved by the entrance of the butler with tea. He lighted the alcohol lamp and retired. Miss Barrington welcomed the occupation which the brewing of the tea gave her. To Roland, furtively watching her, the process became a kind of enchantment. He had never dreamed that so simple a thing could be so enthralling. The talk went on, but his mind was upon her and not upon what she was saying.

"I suppose you didn't care much about it anyway," she was answering him lightly. "A man can always follow his impulses. Really it is the only thing to do. We women would be much better off if we did it oftener."

"You believe in that, do you?"

"We all believe in it, Mr. Scott, but we have not the courage that you had. If I should stand quietly on the dock while

the steamer sailed away without me, my friends would avoid me. They would call me queer. And it is better to be vulgar than to be queer."

"Yes, vulgarity is its own shield and its own sword," said Roland.

"And to be queer," she continued, "is to have no defense. Nothing happens. You just suddenly find yourself alone."

But Roland had not come there to talk about eccentricity. The moments were precious. It might be the last time. He drank the tea he had been holding, and put the cup down on the tray. "Miss Barrington," he said, "you will never find yourself alone. With me it is different. For six months I have been traveling in America, and you are the first woman that I have seen."

She laughed—and her laugh was something to hear. "Where can you have been?" she said. "On ranches, or in the mines, or did you go as far as the Klondyke?"

"I went everywhere," he answered

gravely, "but I did not see a woman who could make me turn back from the thing I meant to do."

The girl tried to throw off the weight of something serious. "You terrify me, Mr. Scott. I have a feeling as of a relentless fate."

He took her up. "It is a relentless fate, Miss Barrington. Don't try to avoid it. You must let me know you. It may be for only a few days. I can't go on forever missing steamers. But for that little time let me see you now and then. It is a simple sporting proposition. Take pity on me and let us be good fellows together."

Miss Barrington was not without a sense of humor and it came to her aid. Roland's apparent sincerity disarmed her, and from being merely tolerant, she began to be amused. She was no longer a *débutante*, but a woman who had seen enough of the world not to take the conventions of society too seriously. The proposed adventure had an attractive side.

"You call this a sporting proposition," she said, "yet it seems rather one-sided. You do not show me what I am to get out of it."

"That is where you gamble," Roland answered. "You must trust me for that. I promise to try at least to make it amusing."

"But we might differ," she retorted, "about what is amusing."

"That is just the point. It will be amusing to find out where we do differ. We can't disagree about that."

"You are quite wrong," she said with emphasis. "The possibilities of disagreement are practically unlimited."

"It is that which makes the game exciting," he answered. "It requires so much skill to avoid them."

"But as far as I can see," she said pensively, "it is my play to move into them."

"And mine to steer you away. I take the responsibility. All I ask of you is to be passive."

"I see. You come to me as a last

resort." She laughed at him and he did not in the least mind. "When all others fail, after six months of fruitless wandering, you appeal to me to be a kind of home for the friendless."

"Precisely," he agreed. "After six months of traveling with an elderly gentleman and an unsympathetic Baedeker, I need a good Samaritan."

"That is a way of saying that you would like to come to dinner." She had let herself go and her eyes shone.

"No." Roland took it all in. It was much, but it seemed so little. "I am not grasping. I don't ask that of you—at least, not yet. Suppose we go for a drive instead. I have never seen the animals in the park. You should not let me go away in ignorance. Won't you show them to me?"

"Certainly not," the girl declined decidedly.

"Where is your sporting blood?" he asked. "The good Samaritan did not need a chaperon."

"But he never met you." And she looked at him in a way that she had. It was hard to keep his head. So he rose and stood over her. "Let me give a dinner for you then," he said. "Pretend that I am a long-lost cousin or a rejected suitor or something. You invite the guests. I exact only one thing. You must sit at my right."

"You are generous," she answered, "but not now. You may come in again to see me if you like, but please no dinners."

He accepted the alternative with a laugh. "Early to-morrow then, and in the meantime do think up ways by which I may show you my gratitude. Really you have saved my life."

"What a responsibility!" she said. "You must share it with me. But to-morrow," she added with a wicked little gleam in her eyes, "is my day for the working girls' club. I shall be out all the morning."

"It is against the rules to shirk like that," he replied. "I am on your hands."

You can't escape. To-morrow before breakfast you are going for a ride in the park."

"Really!" she said involuntarily. "How did you know? That is what I do every morning."

"Of course you do. I knew it." He was exultant. "I am gifted with second sight. There was a fairy godmother at my cradle. You may not know it yourself, but to-morrow you will show me the animals."

With that he left her while she looked at him and smiled.

VI

The Prince Receives

FOR an hour after Roland returned to the hotel he watched the brilliant sunset from his window.

But the orange-tipped clouds and the purple glow on the house-tops were merely a background for his turbulent thoughts. Things had changed for him in the past hour. He persuaded himself that he had gone into the adventure to spite Lockwood rather than to please himself. But he recognized the fact that in the presence of Miss Barrington he had forgotten everything else. He went over their talk in detail with a glow at his heart. The picture of her as she sat making tea in the half-light came back to him vividly. He delighted in it. He brooded over it. Suddenly little Theresa of Felzenbruck came into his mind as he had seen her last, and he

wondered if she had grown to be like Miss Barrington. She had been slim and awkward and very much a child, but even then there was a certain wild charm about her. He was willing to grant that, even while he felt that there was nothing in her to cast this spell upon him.

Von Meyer came in, and after he had heard the Prince's story, he laid a friendly hand upon his shoulder. "So, you have seen her," he said. "You missed the boat for it and you did it. Now are you content to go home?"

Roland grew conscious through his reverie of the anxiety in the Colonel's eyes. "Give me a few days, Karl," he said wistfully. "It was such a little talk with her. I can't leave it at this. But don't worry, Karl. You can trust me."

"You are playing with fire, my son," replied the older man seriously.

"No, I am merely sitting in front of it, trying to get warm," was the answer. "We will sail in a few days, but in the

meantime let us enjoy ourselves. It is positively my last chance, Karl. The rest of my life will be serious enough."

The Colonel went to his own room, shaking his head doubtfully, and Roland stayed where he was, watching the twilight sky. It seemed easy after all to do what one liked, to be a part of the great world. He made plans for nearly every hour of the week which was to follow, taking it for granted that Miss Barrington's time was quite at his disposal.

"She will marry Lockwood, confound him," he said half aloud, "and I shall marry the little Princess. So there can be no harm in this."

His reverie was interrupted by a knock at the door, and in response to his invitation Mr. Stanley Lockwood entered. The Prince, taken by surprise, needed but an instant to recognize his duties as a host.

"I prefer to stand, thank you," was Lockwood's stiff response to his cordiality. He was pale and manifestly found it hard to retain his composure.

"As you choose," replied the Prince, with a quick lift of his chin. "What can I do for you?"

There was an awkward pause for a moment, Roland remaining unmoved and cool beside the table, his cigar between his fingers and his eyes on the twitching countenance of his antagonist.

"When you called this morning," Lockwood said at length in a voice which he could not keep quite level, "I made up my mind that you were trying to work some game, and what I have learned since has convinced me of it."

"And no doubt you will inform me," Roland said quietly, "what the game is."

"You know well enough," said Lockwood, fast losing his self-possession.

"I am sorry to disagree with you," said the Prince, "but I haven't the faintest idea what you are driving at."

"Come, come, Scott." Lockwood gave it up and let himself go. "This isn't a time to waste words. You have taken advantage of a trifling accident in the

street to try to make the acquaintance of a certain lady. She tells me that you actually had the nerve to call on her to-day."

Roland grew white about the lips. "Has she done me the honor to send me this message?" he asked.

"She wouldn't stoop so low," was Lockwood's dry retort. "I'd like you to understand that she only condescended to see you because she was too generous to have you thrown out of the house. You are nothing but a damned adventurer."

"Stop!" said Roland without the slightest show of passion. "I have had enough of this. I am not answerable to you for anything I have done, or for anything I may do in the future. Will you do me the favor to close an unpleasant interview?"

Lockwood began to wonder why he had come. But he was very sure of his opinion of the tranquil reprobate who assumed commanding airs before him. "Well, I'll end it fast enough," he said

unpleasantly, "but I warn you that you would be wise to stay away from Madison Avenue. You won't find it very comfortable if you keep up this business. We have a special way of treating damned blackguards who go sneaking about in wolf's clothing."

Ridiculous as he found it all, Roland was tired of the situation and of the boorish abuse.

"There is a limit to patience, Mr. Lockwood," he said, still quietly. "You force me against my will to throw you out."

With a quick jerk of the arm, he seized Lockwood by the collar, twirled him around and very firmly marched him to the door.

Lockwood struggled to escape from the clutch of the man he had reviled, but he was like fluttering paper in a grasp of steel. Roland had been well trained, and he made a point of keeping himself in condition. Heavy as Lockwood was, he handled him easily enough. Marching him to the door, Roland opened it and

carefully deposited him, limp and heated, in the hallway. As he closed the door again, he heard Lockwood sputter, "You shall pay for this. You shall pay dearly."

Once more alone, Roland began to be sorry that he had lost his temper. He knew his position to be extremely shaky. He dared not risk an exposure of his identity, and it would not be easy for Donald Scott, without connections of any kind, to prove that he was not an adventurer. He could secure financial references from his banker, of course, but he could not endure meeting Lockwood's insufferable arrogance in that way. He wondered what would happen if he should be denounced as an impostor. If he defended himself by falling back upon his name and titles, there would be a storm of scandal and he would return to Altenburg a subject for jest and gossip and a disgrace to his heritage. But in thinking it over, Roland could not help smiling at Lockwood's obvious jealousy. The man was too insignificant to be taken

seriously, and the Prince had no fear of his threats. He began to regard his interference as a huge joke, and it was this side of it that was uppermost when he told the story to von Meyer.

The Colonel saw it from a different standpoint. "I shall send him my card," he said indignantly. "I will fight for you."

"And be jailed for your pains," laughed Roland.

VII

A Ride and Its Price

PRINCE ROLAND was called early the next morning and rose promptly, eager to begin his week of frivolity. Von Meyer's protests the night before, guarded as they were, had only served to confirm him in his purpose. They had dined together at a quiet French restaurant where there was music, and lingered a long time over their coffee without exchanging a word. Roland had made light of the Colonel's fears, being too preoccupied with his castles in Spain to care to listen to them. Even the comic opera, later on, failed to rouse him from his dreams. The gestures of the comedian and the rhythm of the dancing, which were applauded by the audience, formed merely a pleasant background for his reveries.

As he dressed the next morning he felt in the mood to be up and away. A canter in the cool air of the early morning would clear his mind and help him to reason things out. And the possibility of meeting Miss Barrington—but he would not let himself think of that. He tried several horses before he found one to his liking, but he was quite satisfied as he rode up the avenue. The exhilaration of it got into his blood, and as he turned into the park he was ready for any adventure. When it confronted him, rounding a bend in the bridle-path, he advanced to meet it promptly.

The color came into Miss Barrington's cheeks as she saw him, but she was obviously annoyed. She had had time to regret her complaisance.

"The gods are good to me this morning, Miss Barrington," he said as he reined in his horse. "You will not venture to oppose them, will you? You will let me ride with you?" He looked at her so gravely that she had not the heart to refuse.

"But I was just going home," she answered. "You should have come an hour earlier." Her resentment was beginning to disappear and there was no sign that she knew of the unpleasant episode of the day before.

"Please come and play just a little longer," he begged. "The working girls can wait."

"It is enticing, isn't it? I think I must this morning. But after this I shall be your invisible playmate." And she turned and rode at his side, while the groom followed stolidly.

"Oh, do you know that wonderful little book?" Roland asked in surprise. "I saw it in a shop the other day and its title appealed to me—The Invisible Playmate. At that moment I was particularly lonely."

"I have cried myself to sleep over it more than once," she said, and wondered what manner of man this really was.

"I have never done that," Roland

answered, "but I reread it and sent copies to my friends."

"A man is known not so much by the company he keeps, as by the books he sends away," Miss Barrington said. "You can't be very bad if you liked *The Invisible Playmate*."

"I am not so sure of that," said the Prince. "I believe even a hardened criminal would like it."

"But it is not consistent in you. A man of your—what shall I say—nerve?—rarely likes a book of that kind. Perhaps you are really different."

Before he could answer she touched her horse with the whip and he broke into a gallop. Roland quickly overtook her and they dashed on in silence. She rode very straight and he found himself keeping a little behind so that he might watch her. When she reined in her horse she turned with a laugh. "I thought you were going to be amusing."

"How can I remember to be amusing when I am too happy for 'no ds'?" he said.

"I have what I want this morning. If I have to pay for it the rest of my life, it will still be worth while."

There was something tense in his voice which made her afraid to look at him. For an instant she was silent. Then she gave a little laugh to break the strain. "You paid in advance," she said. "You lost the steamer."

It was so little to pay for a ride like this that he brushed it aside with a word.

"It's rather odd, Mr. Scott," she went on, "but I don't even know where you live. We have been friends for a long time, you know"—this with a vague little smile. "Tell me something about your life."

"It has been too prosaic," Roland answered, "to be interesting—a shut-in life, almost monastic. My home is in Altenburg and I have lived there nearly always."

"Altenburg!" said the girl with interest. "I love it. We once spent a winter there."

"Really?" Roland was startled. He

followed it up. "Did you go out much? Do you know people there?"

"I was studying, but my father had business there and my aunt made friends. They had an opportunity to be presented at court, but father was frightened by the knickerbockers and he vowed that he would never bend his knee to the old Prince."

Roland laughed. "And so you did not see Prince Ludwig?"

"Oh, frequently when he was driving, and the Crown Prince, too. I quite fell in love with his photographs. I wonder if he has changed and stiffened like the rest. They all seem like puppets—those little potentates."

Roland leaned down to adjust his stir-up strap. Here was a new and honest point of view. It pleased his sense of humor. "Do you think you would like that kind of life?" he asked. "To be shut in behind stone walls of convention; to be told what you must think and how you must act; to be watched and criticised

and never allowed to live!" The last word was almost a cry—and then he grew conscious that he had startled her. He pulled himself together and went on more quietly: "You don't know what it is, Miss Barrington—a life like that. I have seen enough of it to be sorry for your puppets. Don't you think you could be sorry for them, too?"

She looked up into his eyes and something within her answered them. But she only said softly, "I have never thought of it in that way. It seemed an enviable life—with all that glitter."

They broke into a gallop suddenly, the girl leading, and she did not stop until they turned out of the park. It was in silence that they crossed to the Barrington house, and it was with hardly a word that they parted there.

Roland rode slowly back to the hotel, and, after a tub and breakfast, met the inevitable reaction. An unaccountable melancholy fastened itself upon him. All the color seemed to have suddenly gone

out of his life. Von Meyer had left the hotel early without leaving any word, and there was no one to break the Prince's loneliness. The only thing that eased his mind was the care that he bestowed upon the selection of a bunch of violets which he sent Miss Barrington.

Late in the morning the following sinister note was handed to him:

"Donald Scott, The Waldorf:

"Dear Sir:—Be good enough to call at my office at your earliest convenience.

"Very truly yours,

"PORTER BARRINGTON."

"Does he take me for a servant?" Roland asked indignantly. "He will be disappointed if he expects his commands to be obeyed."

He tore the note into fragments. Then he suddenly remembered that this was the father of Miss Barrington, and the thought cooled his anger. The note began to trouble him. But he ignored the summons and in the evening he was

waited upon by a representative of Mr. Barrington, who quietly and diplomatically repeated the request that he appear during the next forenoon at the office of the capitalist.

"You may say to Mr. Barrington," answered Roland testily, "that I shall be at my apartments at noon to receive him if he has business with me."

The secretary looked astonished. "It is not my prerogative to advise you," he answered, "but Mr. Barrington is a man of determination, accustomed to having his wishes obeyed. I hope you will consider carefully."

"You have my answer, sir," said Roland.

During the night Roland was restless. But it was not entirely the gravity of the situation that troubled him. He appreciated its seriousness, but somehow he rejoiced in it, too. It thrilled him. It put him on his mettle. At daylight he rose and rode out to the park. He tried the bridle-paths until nine o'clock, but Miss Barrington did not appear. He

wondered if she, too, thought him impertinent. He must have made a mistake somewhere. He must have antagonized her. Perhaps the violets were the straw too much. Yet he could not refrain from repeating the gift. He ate little breakfast and paced the floor until noon.

Promptly at the hour a card was brought to him, and in spite of himself his hand shook as he took it, for it bore the name of MR. PORTER BARRINGTON.

The millionaire was shown into the Prince's apartments. He was a distinguished-looking man, not unkindly in appearance, and Roland lost some of his resentment when he saw him. "Her father!" he thought. "The likeness is clear as day."

He offered Mr. Barrington a chair and made some preliminary remarks about the weather. His visitor was calm and business-like. "I am accustomed to have young men call upon me when I request it," he said suavely, "but doubtless

you have reasons for adopting the unusual course. The business I have with you is especially personal and confidential—annoying, I must say. I regret it exceedingly."

Roland was surprised at his tone. He knew what was coming, but he somehow felt a liking for the man.

"To be frank," continued Mr. Barrington, as Roland made no comment, "I cannot countenance your acquaintance with my daughter. The situation is peculiar. You have taken advantage of an accident to enter my house without the slightest introduction."

"You are indeed frank," said Roland coldly.

"I appreciate fully the fact that you did my daughter and her cousin a service, and neither they nor I will forget it. As an evidence of my gratitude I shall be glad to make what must be an inadequate recognition of your gallantry. In return I must ask you not to see my daughter again. You see I waste no time on

words, but I trust you will understand me." From a large leather pocket-book he took a check, and said, "Will you name your figure?"

Roland had risen sharply from his chair at the first mention of a gift. He stood absolutely silent and immobile, his fine eyes fixed with a curious expression upon his visitor. As Mr. Barrington looked up at the tall distinction of the younger man, it was borne in upon him swiftly that he had made a mistake. Only his absorption in his errand had prevented an earlier discovery. He was too much a man of affairs not to know something of men.

"Mr. Barrington," Roland said finally, and there was a slight tremor in his voice, "wouldn't it be a little better to tell me that I am an adventurer and an impostor—a blackmailer who has sought the acquaintance of your daughter to extort money? I have never before been flattered in just this way. You honor me too far."

There was that in his voice which brought the older man to his feet. He was pale but firm. "Do I understand that you reject my proposition?" he asked.

"Do you really think me a man to sell my friendship for money?" he said with a touch of bitterness. "You are Miss Barrington's father, and in spite of all this I respect you, but I wish you to know that there is only one person in the world who can bid me sever my acquaintance with that lady—and that person is Miss Barrington herself. Do you understand me, sir?"

"You defy me, then?" asked the old millionaire, not without an unacknowledged admiration for his antagonist.

"You may call it what you like," said Roland quietly. "I have given you my answer."

"Since you refuse a peaceful settlement," Mr. Barrington retorted in some heat, "you must accept the consequences. I shall take matters into my own hands. Good morning, sir."

"Good morning," echoed Roland.

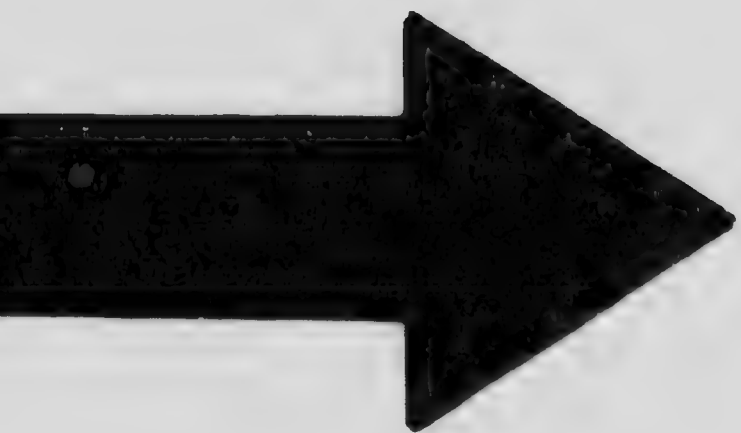
When his visitor was gone he flung himself into a chair. At the end of ten minutes he rose and set himself the task of answering his letters. He had decided on a radical course of action—the only course that remained open to him. He would reveal his identity to the girl and secure her promise of secrecy. He would place himself in the right light before her, at least. For the others he cared nothing. Then he would bid her farewell and take his departure. Before he reached this decision he went over the ground pretty thoroughly. He could not go away and let her believe him an impostor, frightened off by threats. She would forget him quickly enough without that. He knew he could have little peace of mind in the future if she misjudged him. He would risk exposure rather than be so unfair to her and to her faith in him. But Roland was forced by circumstances to change his mind. Things did not work out as he expected. Miss

Barrington was not at home when he drove to her door, and in a mood of despair he returned to the hotel. He found von Meyer anxiously awaiting him with a cablegram. It was from the prime minister of Altenburg and was in cipher, the translation of which read as follows:

"I am grieved to inform your royal highness that his royal highness, Prince Ludwig, has been the victim of an attack of paralysis and is dangerously ill. While a fatal termination is not expected, we must be prepared, and the speedy return of your royal highness to Altenburg is most earnestly desired.

'VON BECKER.'





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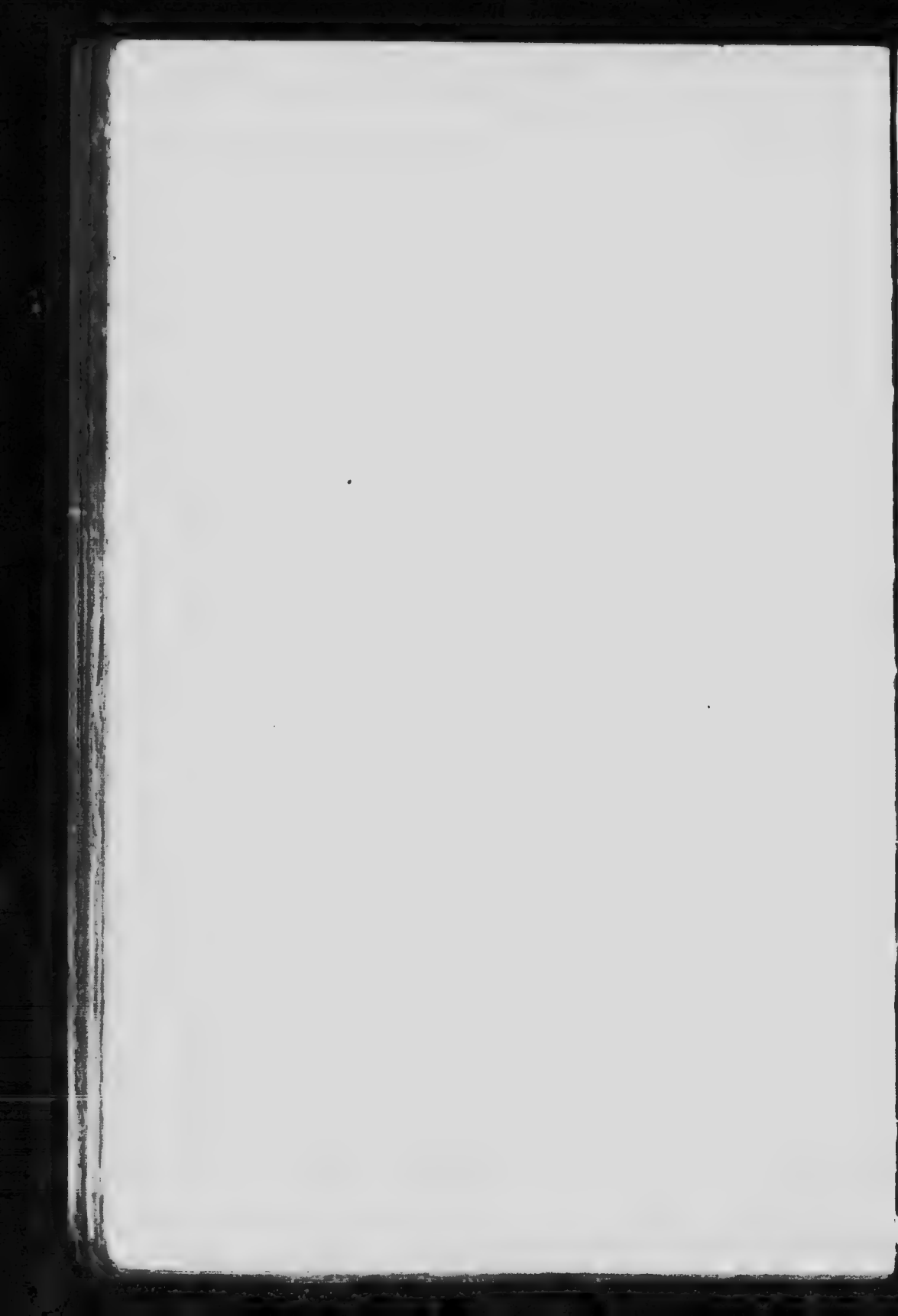
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VIII

A Diplomatic Mission

MY POOR little romance is ended, Karl," the Prince said when he had recovered from the shock of the cablegram. "This is its death warrant."

The older man placed his hand consolingly on the young man's shoulder and said quietly, "Donald Scott is dead, but God save the Crown Prince!"

They were silent for a moment and then the duties of the hour pressed upon them. It was necessary to prepare for a hurried departure. The Kaiser Wilhelm would sail the following morning, von Meyer learned, and passage was secured. There were orders to give and cables to send, and, after a busy hour, Roland was brought up with a start by the realization that he had not once thought of Miss Barrington. He rather

reproached himself. It seemed like treason. But now that she had come back, he was face to face with the necessity of deciding whether or not he should attempt to see her again. He knew that in all probability he would not be admitted, and he hated to submit again to so petty a humiliation. Yet if he should see her—his imagination carried him far afield. He was afraid to trust himself. He did not know where a farewell to her might lead him. In his dreaming he had turned away from his desk to look out at the sky. Suddenly he rose, walked over to the Colonel and put his hand rather shyly on the older man's shoulder. "What would you do, Karl?" he asked, and told him his dilemma. "I can't leave without letting her know that I am not an impostor."

"Send a note, then," von Meyer suggested.

"But I could write a volume."

The Colonel was suddenly seized with an idea. "I will be your ambassador.

Entrust me with your dispatches and they shall be faithfully delivered."

"But they wouldn't admit you," Roland exclaimed.

"Why not? The servants never saw me, and she would not remember me. There is no other way. I shall go."

"But, Karl," Roland pleaded, "don't you think there is a chance that I could see her?"

But the Colonel, ingenuous as he seemed, was wary. There was something a little too serious about this affair. He felt that it had gone far enough. "There isn't a chance," he answered. "Her father has given his orders, you may be sure. They have refused once, you know, to admit you." He looked up at Roland affectionately. "It is hard, my boy, but you can't do it. It would not do to put yourself in the position of submitting again to such impertinence. Anything might happen. You might be gravely affronted. And you could not answer it as another man might. Re-

member, Roland, within a few days the eyes of the world may be upon you."

"You are right, Karl, you are always right," he admitted, but there was a break in his voice. "It's the walls of the prison again. I never get far away from it. How could I live, Karl, if it were not for you?" Something in his voice went to the Colonel's heart.

"Don't take it that way, my boy," he said. "The new responsibilities will make it all different. Be a man and face it."

"I know, I know," the young Prince answered. "I'll do it when the time arrives. But now—you must give me a moment. Your plan is the best, Karl, I can see. Tell her as little as possible, but make it plain that I am not an adventurer. She doesn't believe that anyway," he burst out. "I know her better than that."

The Colonel rose to the command and left him. Roland stood silent for a moment after he had gone. Then he clenched his fist and said as though the

words were jerked from him, "What a beast of a world it is anyway!"

It was an hour later when he roused himself, rose from where he had been sitting motionless—his arms folded upon the table, his forehead in the bend of his elbow—walked over to the desk and looked over some letters that he had neglected in the morning. Time slipped away and it grew dark. He began to wonder what was keeping Karl. He even had time to become uneasy before the door flew open and the Colonel himself appeared. It was a changed and dejected Colonel, however, who slowly entered.

"My God, Karl," Roland exclaimed in alarm, "what has happened to you?"

Von Meyer sank exhausted into a chair, saying cheerlessly, "I have failed, my boy, utterly failed. I deserve to be court-martialed and disgraced. Never again will I try diplomacy. I was made wrong."

Roland found it hard to conceal his im-

patience. "What do you mean, Karl? What can you have done?"

"At first everything went well," he answered. "She was at home and I sent up my card. I was shown into a long room to wait. It was only a minute that I sat there when that damned blackguard, Lockwood, came in. I knew him at once. He looked the part." He broke into expletives, half German, half English, but entirely emphatic.

"Are you crazy?" asked Roland. "In God's name, what is the matter with you?"

The Prince's sternness brought the Colonel to reason. He rose from the sofa on which he had thrown himself, and seated himself in a straight-backed chair. The narrative was continued more calmly. "Well, he came in. You know his manner. He said to me, 'You have business with Miss Barrington?' I told him politely that I had. Then he asked me if I was not your friend."

"He has looked me up pretty thoroughly," interjected Roland.

"He accused you of being afraid to come yourself, and I had hard work to keep my temper. He was abusive and I grew tired of it at last. 'I wish to see Miss Barrington,' I told him. 'I asked only for her.' Then he became angry and said she was not at home and would not see me if she were. I answered as quietly as I could that I would wait and submit the matter to her judgment. Then he told me that I was impertinent and ordered me out of the house. I shall not flatter him by repeating what he said."

"Tell the whole story," demanded Roland, and the Colonel continued reluctantly:

"He said, 'Go, and if you two blackguards ever come here again, I shall call the police.' It was more than I could stand, to hear you called a blackguard. I am ashamed of myself, but I confess that I struck him. No man can say a thing like that about you."

"Go on," said Roland impatiently.
"What did he do?"

"He started back and I thought he was going to strike out at me. But just then there was a flutter in the hall and she came in—an angel—ach, what loveliness!"

The Prince took a turn or two across the floor. "What next?" he said.

"She was tall and very scornful." The Colonel rose and drew himself up in grotesque imitation of Miss Barrington. "'Gentlemen!' she said very quick and sharp, and we both looked ashamed. She had my card in her hand and she looked at it as if she did not like it. When she turned to me she said some high and mighty words which meant that she thought me an impostor and a black-guard."

"She had seen you strike Lockwood?" interjected Roland.

"To be sure she had," the Colonel sputtered, "and she does not know enough about that damned coward to know he deserved it. She told me very politely that she had not the honor of my acquaintance. She said I had not acted

like a gentleman in coming to her house without an invitation and attacking her friend. She must beg me to withdraw, she said."

"But, Karl," broke in the Prince, "what were you doing all this time? Didn't you tell her why you had come?"

"I tried to, but somehow it didn't go. I said I had come as your representative with a message from you. Then Lockwood broke in." He grew heated again. "He had stood there like an idiot, letting the girl defend him. But when I mentioned you he could not keep still. He tried to be dignified and said, 'Miss Barrington does not care to receive messages from Mr. Scott.' My God, I could have murdered him!"

"But what did she say?" the Prince asked eagerly.

"She said nothing at all. I told her that my mission was important and was with herself alone. But she let him answer for her."

Roland winced. Yet the Colonel went

on remorselessly. "He said that no message I could bring would be important to Miss Barrington. Then he rang the bell and told the footman to show me out."

The Prince jumped up and walked over to the long table. As the silence continued, he turned and said sharply, "Do you mean to say that was all? Did you go away like that?"

"What was there to do?" the Colonel answered, somewhat ruffled. "Would you have me force your confidences upon a lady who did not care to hear them? As a matter of fact, I did make another effort. I turned my back on him and said to her, 'The message I bring, madam, you will be glad to hear. Some day you will regret it if you do not listen to me.'"

"And what did she say?" Roland broke in.

"She wavered, I thought, until she looked at Lockwood. Then she said in a low voice, 'I am sorry, but after what has happened I cannot talk to you.' I thought she was going to say more, but

that coward joined her and she stopped. I bowed and left them together."

Roland threw back his head as though he had been struck. "Oh, Karl, Karl," he said, "how blind I have been! It was all a game with her after all. She found me amusing, but she never really cared."

There was something in his face that the Colonel did not like. "Don't say that," he said. "It was my fault. I bungled it."

"No, it was not you, Karl." Roland was sure now. "You were right—you could not have done anything else." He was silent a moment and then he broke into a gayety that was worse than tears. "Well, we'll go back to prison, Karl, tomorrow. Then we shall have something to think of. We can design costumes for the court balls and decide upon questions of precedence. It's an exciting life we'll lead there, Karl." His voice broke. "Let's go back to it."

IX

On the Throne

THREE months had passed. Roland had become the reigning Prince of Altenburg in stern reality. Ludwig lived only long enough to welcome his nephew and solemnly entrust to him his honors and his responsibilities. Touched by the interview and by his death, which quickly followed, Roland was disposed to take the cares of his position very seriously. The gravity of the new duties weighed upon him. They lined his face and put into his eyes a brooding sense of care. It seemed no light thing to assume the government, to take his place among men older than he and weighted with experience. He might have followed the easy course and allowed his uncle's ministers to manage things, but his own theory of duty was alien to this and he had

observed and thought. He determined that the world—his world—should be a little different because he had been born—a little happier, he hoped.

It was almost immediately after his uncle's death that Roland astonished his cabinet by taking control. The prime minister, von Becker, remonstrated that the task was heavy for him; the others were obviously disconcerted. There were ominous mutterings of disapproval. But Roland stood his ground, insisting that if he wore the honors, he must also carry the burden. Realizing the delicacy of his position, he discovered in himself unexpected resources of diplomacy. The strong men of the principality must not be antagonized. To make them feel his control without regretting it was no simple task. It called out his best energies and rewarded them. He began to make friends; he gained the respect of his cabinet, the admiration of the court. It meant labor, but at the moment labor was what he needed. For a task like this

his mind must be kept on the alert, and when he found it wandering, he would take to solitude in his den or go off for a long ride with von Meyer in the open. With the Colonel he became a boy again. With him there were no reserves, no circumlocutions. He alone was certain not to misinterpret his talk and his silences. With him there was a sense of freedom which brought back the old days, the old exhilarating freedom.

They laughed often about the journey to America; but in their talk Katherine Barrington's name was never mentioned. Yet, though von Meyer tried to think that Roland had forgotten, it was always present in the pauses. His eyes had a strange look in them now and then, and the Colonel would find himself suddenly, in the middle of a sentence, talking to empty air while the Prince galloped on ahead, or to an abstraction that was impossible to break. Roland had fought hard to forget, but there were moments when the thought of the girl crowded

everything else from his mind and left him homesick and rebellious. He would chide himself with the reminder that she had played with him and thrown him over. He tried not to forget that she had treated his friend with an insulting indifference. But in spite of it all the memory of her smile, of the look in her eyes, would have its way.

It was on a day when he was particularly filled with it and could not shake off the melancholy that was always its companion, that he was interrupted by his secretary, who announced that Count von Becker, the prime minister, requested an audience. It was reluctantly granted and began with some needless discussion of matters of detail. Roland felt that something more important was in the air, and when it finally came, it brought him up with a start.

"Your royal highness has been singularly successful," von Becker was saying, "in securing the affection of the people. I confess that when your royal highness

came to the throne, I was apprehensive of a different result. The mysterious journey had been unpopular, and during the minority your royal highness had held himself so aloof from the people——”

“Aloof!” broke in the Prince angrily, “do you suppose I wanted to keep away from them?”

“Not at all, not at all,” answered the minister suavely, “but circumstances prevented the companionship your royal highness doubtless desired. The masses, however, do not understand these barriers and I feared that there might be some temporary antagonism—merely temporary, of course, but difficult to handle. I am delighted to see that your royal highness has overcome it completely. The coronation ceremonies were designed with singular tact in this respect. They had the effect of bringing the personality of your royal highness into the humblest household. It was a most unusual condescension on the part of a reigning Prince.”

“Yes, yes, Count,” Roland interrupted,

knowing well that it was just this attitude that von Becker had emphatically disapproved, "I hope you will not forget that I am made of exactly the same clay as all the others."

"Your royal highness is too generous," the minister obsequiously assured him, "but perhaps this condescension" — how Roland hated the word! — "has been rewarded. Yet one more effort is necessary to cement this popularity, to make it unalterably yours." He hesitated. "The people desire of all things to see a princess upon your throne. You will pardon what may seem presumption, Sire," von Becker continued, "but my colleagues and I, whom your royal highness has honored by calling your counselors, have talked much about—the——"

"About the advisability of marriage?" interrupted Roland, startled and alert. He rose suddenly, with the military instinct to take a blow standing, walked with erect precision to the window, and looked out over the castle garden, seeing

nothing. It was von Becker who broke the silence.

"Your counselors, Sire, and your people as well, believe that the alliance would——"

But Roland could not endure these arguments. He turned sharply to von Becker. "You doubtless refer to the Princess Theresa. There is plenty of time to think of matrimony, Count. Let us talk of something else."

But the minister was not to be put off so easily. "I need not point out your duty, Sire," he said. "But I can tell the wishes of your people better than your royal highness. Believe me, Sire, they demand it."

The Prince restrained his anger with some difficulty. "I have had enough of this, von Becker," he said quietly. The Count began to protest, but Roland cut him off. "I expect to do what is best for my country and my people. But I must have time."

The minister withdrew, somewhat crest-

fallen, and Roland gave orders that he should not be again interrupted. He had seen the Princess for the first time since their betrothal at the coronation and had found her charming. She had played an important part in the ceremonies, and her prominence was evidently popular. In the eyes of the world they were a happy pair of young lovers, but they never found themselves alone without a certain embarrassment. Not once did they speak of the betrothal or look into the future. Roland had always considered it a far-away matter, and it was disconcerting to be confronted with it at this moment. Yet the marriage, with its assurance of peace and harmony, would be a signal for rejoicing. It would go far toward adjusting the dispute about the boundary line in a district where coal had recently been discovered, and this was a difficulty which threatened to become ominous. If it could not be adjusted by the joint commission, which was proving itself a quarrelsome body, it

might lead to much unpleasantness. A marriage with Theresa would smooth these things down. But he could not face it. He knew in his heart what he would finally do, but he felt that he must have a brief respite; he must have time to pull himself together.

An hour later the lord chamberlain was admitted to submit a list of those who were to be presented at the first of Roland's "drawing-rooms." The Prince roused himself and glanced carelessly over the names, expecting to approve the list without a question. But he was startled to find upon it the name "Mr. Stanley Lockwood, presented by the minister from the United States."

"Who is this gentleman?" he asked, not quite calmly.

"He begs to be presented through his excellency the American Minister," the lord chamberlain answered. "He comes from New York and is stopping at the Grand Hotel."

"Very well. You may leave the list.

Kindly ask Colonel von Meyer to attend me here."

The Colonel kept him waiting much too long for Roland's impatience. There was a boyish excitement in his manner when the door finally opened. "Karl," he said, eager and radiant, "I have a piece of news that may interest you. Who do you think wishes to be presented at the drawing-room?"

A light shone in the eyes of the old officer. Only Miss Barrington, he thought, could call out that expression, but her name was best left unspoken. He shook his head.

"The person who craves the honor of making obeisance to us," said Roland, "is the gentleman who once in New York had the satisfaction of turning you out of doors."

Von Meyer's smile changed to a savage frown. "The devil!" he exclaimed. Then recovering himself, he added, "I beg your pardon, but we fight then."

"You will do nothing of the kind."

Roland smiled. "On the contrary," he said, "he shall be presented. How charmed he will be when he recognizes his old friend Scott!"

Then the Prince had a thought and again he scanned the list eagerly. Mr. Lockwood and two ladies from Des Moines were the only names offered by the American Minister, and Roland felt unaccountably relieved. "You must find out about Lockwood. He may not be alone," he said. "And you must do it quietly. Really, I am half afraid to trust you."

The Colonel laughed. "You may trust me," he said seriously, after a moment, "to the end." Then he laughed again. "I go quietly now, but later I may petition your royal highness to let me fight him just once."

"What a little world this is!" Roland mused after his friend had gone. "I supposed I had left him behind forever. And it would be queerer still if——" The Prince paused and stood for a long time

gazing absently from the window over the town of Oberholtz, lying beneath him. Beyond the city was a stretch of blood-red ice, colored by the dying sun. But Roland saw neither the spires of the city nor the splendor of the bay, with the snow-laden mountains beyond. There was a smile in his eyes. He was looking down into the laughing face of a care-free American girl. He saw her still as he had last seen her in New York. He saw her as he had seen her every day during those weeks and months of separation. Everything was forgotten—honors and difficulties, misunderstandings and evasions, everything except that Miss Barrington might be in the very city at his feet.

The sun sank behind the mountains, and the quick darkness settled over Oberholtz. The castle, high on a rocky cliff, caught the sunlight longer than the valley, but the ancient turreted building, like the town, was speedily overshadowed by night. Yet Roland waited immovable,

watching the lights in the valley and the stars in the sky as they came out, and thinking of many things.

Late that night, working alone in his study, the Prince received a visit from Colonel von Meyer. He felt a sudden tightening of the heart at the coming of his friend. "Well, Karl," he said, affecting rather badly a passive interest, "what did you discover? Is Lockwood alone?"

"Not alone," exclaimed the Colonel with suppressed excitement. "There are ladies in the party."

"Who are they?" exclaimed the Prince, forgetting his languor and starting up.

"There is an elderly lady in the party," continued von Meyer, with exasperating deliberation.

"And no one else?" asked Roland, with a depressed droop in his voice. "Come, Karl, don't be hard on me."

"I am afraid the cruelty," the Colonel said seriously, "is in telling you that Miss Barrington is here."

"And she is still Miss Barrington?"

"Yes. A Miss Rand is with her. The other, I am given to understand, is an aunt who travels in the capacity of chaperon. They arrived to-day."

"Did you see her—them, I mean?" asked Roland.

"No, they were in their rooms. Lockwood leaves to-morrow for Geneva, and the others will await his return here."

"Thank you, Karl," Roland said. "You may leave me now."

The old soldier turned at the door and looked at the Prince, but he knew better than to give advice. "Be careful, son," he said simply. "You need the courage of a soldier."

After he had gone Roland sat for a time in deepest reverie, the stillness of the castle broken only by the ticking of the clock on the onyx mantelpiece and by the occasional sputtering of the wood fire, now burned almost to glowing embers on the hearth. The state papers lay untouched on the table where they had fallen when the Colonel entered.

As the clock struck two, Roland rose and left the apartment by a private door. Passing through a secluded passageway, he ascended a flight of stairs to his dressing-room. There he selected a fur cap and a greatcoat with a heavy cape. "You may retire, Hugo," he said to the sleepy valet who had been awaiting him. "I am going to take a turn about the cliff."

Hugo bowed. He was too well accustomed to the nocturnal eccentricities of the young Prince to be surprised.

Roland made his way out of the castle, going by devious passages and encountering several sentries, whom he passed with a word. The night was cold but clear. It vaguely revealed a scene of rich, mysterious beauty. Roland was not unresponsive to its appeal, but it did not make him pause. He walked briskly down the road for a mile or more, until he found himself opposite a huge, irregular stone building, standing on the edge of the precipitous cliff, with the frozen waters of the lake hundreds of feet below. This

was the Grand Hotel. It had once been a great château, the home of a noble family for many generations. But recently the main branch had become extinct, and the heirs, too poor to maintain the castle, sold it to the hotel management. In summer it was filled with travelers from Germany, France and Russia, for whom its traditions and its wild and daring site gave it a romantic charm. In winter it usually held few guests, for there were not many to venture into the snow-locked mountains of Altenburg. •

Opposite the hotel the Prince paused, and gazed in silence at the frowning, shadowy structure, dimly outlined in the starlight. A single window of all the great building showed a light and set Roland wondering.

X

At the Grand Hotel

BEFORE retiring that night, Roland took from his desk a crumpled little note—the one Miss Barrington had sent him in New York—and looked at it long and tenderly. He spent the night between sleeping and waking, in a futile endeavor to persuade himself that he was much too angry with her to make any effort to see her. He told himself many times that in refusing to listen to von Meyer she had refused to listen to him. An affront to one was an affront to both. He repeated over and over again that he was the merest passing shadow in her life—like many another, unheeded and unremembered. “By this time,” he thought, “I am forgotten.” And he said it again for greater emphasis, though he could not quite believe it. It was like condoning an

insult to approach her, he knew; yet all the arguments he could bring to bear had no effect upon the hunger in his heart. He ended, as he began, with the feeling that he could not let her go.

It was early when he rang for Hugo, and after his coffee he went into his den to write Miss Barrington a note. He had some trouble in finding paper without crest or coronet, and when it was finally found, the task that had seemed so simple became hedged round with difficulties. He wrote three notes and tore them up, and even the fourth, which he finally sent, had more sentiment in it than he liked. It read,

"Dear Miss Barrington: I hope I am not giving your memory too heavy a task in asking permission to see you. If you still carry in your mind even a fleeting impression of a ride in the park, which is vivid in mine, if you are still generous to a stranger, you will give me an opportunity to tell you how sharply I resented

your indifference to my friend and how easily I forgave it. New York is far away and you are here.

"Very sincerely yours,

"DONALD SCOTT.

"Thursday."

The note gave no address, but the bearer was carefully instructed to wait for an answer. The delay seemed endless, but it was finally brought to him during a cabinet meeting. He glanced at the outside of it and hid it hurriedly in his pocket. Nothing would have induced him to read it with these curious eyes upon him. To avoid an appearance of restlessness he put an extra deliberation into his instructions and comments, but it was necessary to keep a tight hold upon his mind to prevent it from wandering. When he was finally released, he felt like a boy on a holiday. In his den he looked at the envelope hungrily a moment before he opened it. When he did so he found a very simple little note, which said that Miss Barrington would be

glad to see him at nine o'clock. She was to be out, she added, in the afternoon. It disappointed him a little, but it delighted him, too.

The delay was hard to endure, but the only relief he allowed himself was when he sent for von Meyer and told him about it. Down underneath, the Colonel was very anxious, but he covered it up with a genial sympathy. Yet he expressed some fear that Miss Barrington would recognize him from photographs in the shops.

"There are only those childish things," Roland exclaimed. "You forget that for some time I have been avoiding photographers."

"At the risk of getting yourself disliked," retorted the Colonel. "I remember your obstinacy."

It was a little before nine when the Prince of Altenburg left the castle by a side entrance and alone. He was so heavily muffled in a cloak that little was visible except his eyes. The night was

propitious for the enterprise, for there was no moon to make his muffled figure conspicuous. So keen a wind was blowing that hardly any one was on the road leading to the Grand Hotel. Once at the hotel, Roland avoided the office and sent up his card by an attendant, who did not suspect the royal visitor. It seemed an age before he was conducted to a little drawing-room on the first floor. There he found Miss Barrington; but he felt a sharp sense of disappointment when she took his hand quite simply and said, "It is very good to see you again, Mr. Scott."

There was nothing in the speech, but Roland fancied he discovered behind her eyes something more than her smile of amusement would indicate. She seemed to be still trying to analyze this extraordinary person who had a talent for doing what he liked.

"I hardly knew," Roland began with a touch of pride, "how I would be received. In New York I had the honor of sending

my friend to you with a message. You refused to listen to it."

They were still standing and Miss Barington drew herself up with a hauteur so bewitching that Roland found it hard to remember her offense.

"You chose a strange advocate, Mr. Scott," she said. "If you have heard the whole story of that interview, you will understand that I could do nothing else."

"But he was my friend," he insisted. "You knew he was my friend."

"Yes, I knew it," she answered, and looked at him as no one had ever quite looked at him before. "But he was not you. Please don't let us talk of that, Mr. Scott. It is so long since I have seen you. It was insufferable, I know, but you will forgive me. You have forgiven me or you would not be here."

He laughed as they sat down, and he said slowly, his eyes upon hers, "You have not changed."

"But you have," she answered lightly, in some curiosity. "I don't know what it

is, but there is something about you that is different. You have a look of——" She hesitated for a word. "Well, I can see that you have a way of getting what you want. There is about you," and she waved a fluttering hand, "an air of command. It makes me feel very insignificant indeed."

Roland laughed, but he did not quite like it. "You conceal it well," he exclaimed. "You put up a brave front. But now that you speak of it, I may as well confess that with me it is all a manner. I was trained in a hard school, and that is all I brought out of it. I look as though I had my own way to hide the fact that I never get it."

"Well, why isn't it better not to get it?" she exclaimed. "I have had my own way all my life, and it grows monotonous. I always repent, too, after I get it. It dawns upon me that the other way was really the best. And that feeling is desperately uncomfortable."

"Really?" said Roland questioningly.

"I don't know what it is. I have had so little experience of having my own way."

"You!" she exclaimed scornfully. "I believe you would not recognize opposition if you should meet it in the street. You don't know what it is. One can see that in your face. You, too, must find it monotonous."

"Monotonous!" It broke from him and the sincerity of it was evident. "It was deadly until that day in New York. You cannot think how impossible it seemed. Outwardly my life has been smooth enough, as you say. I have been given the conventional things that I was supposed to want. But within I have raged, I have fumed, I have been almost desperate for the want of one little hour that was my own." His voice had grown tense, and it came from his heart.

A startled look in the girl's eyes suddenly recalled him to himself. "I don't know why I talk to you in this way. There is something in you that drags it out of me. I have never before made a

confidante of a woman," he added with a laugh, "and the men wouldn't listen even if I cared to have them."

She smiled, and he felt that no other pardon was necessary. But the smile, wonderful as it was, did not quite take from her eyes the look of bewilderment.

"Why do you come to Altenburg if you want freedom?" she asked after a moment.

Roland pulled himself together. "It is my home—my work is here," he said carefully.

"I didn't know any one worked here," Miss Barrington protested. "This toy principality seems too busy with its politics and intrigues to encourage work. Doesn't it all seem foolish to you after New York, where they are really trying to do things? Here they imitate even the smallest conventionalities of the great world and play the game as pompously as though it were worth while. Even your little princeling pretends to be a mighty potentate."

She was so graceful in her irony, she took the sting out of it so delicately with her eyes that Roland could only laugh. "Oh, don't be so hard upon him," he laughed. "He would like to do better."

"Why doesn't he try, then? In Felzenbruck they know exactly what he ought to do."

"Felzenbruck!" exclaimed Roland. "Have you been there?"

"We have just come from the capital. There was a great deal of talk about the boundary dispute."

"What did they say of it?" For the moment even Miss Barrington was forgotten.

"Oh, you must know," she answered. "They were very sure that there would be serious trouble, even war perhaps, between the two countries if it were not for the alliance between Prince Roland and the Princess Theresa. Isn't it a delightfully romantic way out of the difficulty?"

Roland looked at her moodily. "Yes,

it is highly romantic," he said. But he did not laugh.

"It was common talk in Felzenbruck that Prince Friedrich had set his heart upon it. How does the young Prince feel? He will surely marry her, will he not?"

"He is very human, Miss Barrington," Roland answered gravely. He rose and stood quietly before her. "Such a marriage may be a good thing for the country and it may not. But he is young and hot-blooded and he has a longing to live his own life."

There was something intangibly melancholy in his voice and in his eyes. Miss Barrington was vaguely touched as she looked up at him.

"You plead his cause well," she said softly. "It would be easy to believe that he had told you his story."

Roland forced a laugh. "I have watched him and I know a little about men," he said.

As he stood looking down upon her,

drinking in her delicate distinction, he was interrupted by the entrance of her aunt, Mrs. Gerard. He lingered a little to speak to her, and Miss Barrington mentioned Lockwood's intention to be presented at the next drawing-room. She herself, she added, had cared very little for the ceremony, though she was curious to see the castle. Roland found that they had planned to visit the next day the part of it that was open to the public.

"You will let me arrange things," he said, "so that you may see it all. The oldest and best parts of the place are only open to visitors, when the Prince is in residence, by his special permission."

They thanked him and he said good-night. He said it in commonplace words, but the real good-night lay in his eyes. He went out wondering what he could ever do to make himself remembered by such a woman. He felt impotent. He was sure that he had said the wrong things and done the illogical ones. She

could not possibly think of him with any respect.

Plunged in gloom as deep as the night and muffled to the eyes, he was proceeding as rapidly as the gale would allow when some instinct moved him to look back over the lonely stretch of road he had just traversed. Was it fancy, or did he see there in the shadow of the cliff the figure of a man? The thought that he was followed sent an angry flush to his cheek. To make sure he was not mistaken, he again faced the gale, but reduced his speed for some minutes. Then turning suddenly, he saw a dark shadowy outline about a hundred yards behind. The night was too black to distinguish anything beyond the mere fact of a presence—a human presence—in the road. Roland felt instinctively that the man was trailing him. To make certain, he walked quickly toward him, taking out a revolver as he went.

For a moment the figure in the road seemed to remain stationary. Then real-

izing that his presence had been discovered, the man ran quickly away. Roland gave chase for a short distance, but, hampered as he was, he was soon out-distanced by the fugitive, who vanished into the darkness that hung over the cliff. Roland stood still for a few minutes in uncertainty. Then realizing the futility of searching for a marauder amid the intricacies of the rocky cliff, he turned once more toward the entrance of the frowning castle.

XI

In Castle Rheinwald

AS SOON as Prince Roland had breakfasted the next morning, he summoned one of his gentlemen-in-waiting and said to him, "Captain Kreuger, I am informed that three American ladies will visit the castle to-day. It is my wish that they be shown special courtesy and taken to every point of interest, particularly to the high tower and to the dungeons. Give them access to all parts of the castle except my private study, where I shall be engaged."

The Prince gave some further directions for the pleasure of his expected guests, and Captain Kreuger retired, secretly astonished, as such a command had never been given him before. Half an hour later the officer was again summoned before his royal highness.

"In passing through the north gallery,"

said Roland, "I observe that the portrait of myself, which was painted just before I left Altenburg, is in need of reframing. You will have it removed at once."

Captain Kreuger bowed and withdrew, wondering why his royal highness was so notional. He was sure that the portrait was not as much in need of reframing as half the pictures in the gallery. Yet there was nothing to do but obey orders.

The portrait was too easily recognized as Donald Scott to be allowed to retain the place of honor in the gallery while this friend, who must not know the Prince, went through it. Roland was thankful that he had remembered it in time. For almost an hour he found himself standing before a window to watch the road that wound up the cliff to the castle. Occasionally he grew impatient with himself and tried to take up his work. But it would not go. The window was too powerful a magnet. When at last he saw Miss Barrington and the others alight

from their carriage and enter at the visitor's door, it was hard to refrain from going down to welcome them. He paced the floor of the turret-room for a time, unable to quiet the beating of his heart. It seemed too unreal, too visionary a consummation of his dreams, that she at last should be in his own land—his own home—wandering through the familiar halls, and touching as she passed the tapestries that had supplied his childhood with hobgoblins. He let his fancy travel over the old castle, illuminated now with her presence. Yet it was a disappointing dream after all. He could not see her. He could not have a share in her gayety. It was humiliating to feel that he was only a spy, watching from afar, taking the little that he had no right to receive. It made him desperate—this separation. It seemed too cruel, too unnecessary. For a moment he rebelled against a fate which imprisoned him. Suddenly a wild desire rushed over him to force her to think of him, to make her suffer as he

was suffering. He could not endure the thought of her indifference.

Acting upon an impulse, he left his study, and proceeding with some caution lest he encounter the visitors on the way, repaired to the round tower of the castle. This tower rose high and imposing above the smaller turrets and commanded a beautiful view of the grounds and the surrounding country. He had not long to wait. Discreetly hidden by the drapery at the window, he saw Miss Barrington emerge upon the top of a tower, followed by Miss Rand, Mrs. Gerard and the guide, in whom the Prince was astonished to discover the wily Colonel.

"The rascal," thought Roland, filled with jealousy that the Colonel should have the delight of showing Miss Barrington the castle, while the master of the place feared to show his head. He wondered if von Meyer had not been recognized until he remembered that during the American journey the Colonel had sacrificed his beard.

The little party, however, was ignorant

of the Prince's wrath and proceeded on its way, its gallant leader bubbling with happiness. At intervals Roland could see them, and then there was a half-hour—ages it seemed to him—when they were invisible. He had almost persuaded himself that they had gone without enduring the fatigue of the climb up the round tower, when he heard them ascending the winding stairway. Roland was prepared for this emergency. With the door of the apartment partly ajar, he stood listening as they slowly approached, often pausing to rest, to look out of a window upon the valley, or to inspect the curious apartments of the ancient tower. Roland could hear their exclamations of surprise and feel their wondering silences. He was glad Miss Barrington said little. He had associations of his own with the old tower that made every stone in it sacred to him.

The Colonel described with great volubility the interesting points, interpolating compliments with much gallantry.

The talk revived Roland's unhappiness, and the impulse to go down and meet them was almost uncontrollable. He had a longing to put the Colonel out of service and proclaim himself master. He felt a boyish desire to show her his power. But his self-control had been too well developed for the overthrow of reason, and as the party was about to enter the chamber, Roland slipped out on the opposite side, descended a few steps and laid his hands on a door that led to a steep, ladder-like stairway, once a secret passage. It was the Prince's intention to elude his visitors in this way, but to his dismay the door was locked. Not since the beginning of this reign, when he had opened the round tower to visitors, had this door been fastened.

In vain did he push and pull and utter imprecations under his breath. The massive oaken door was immovable. Above him he could hear the voices of Miss Barrington and the Colonel. To be caught in his own trap seemed too fool-

ish. He stood still for a moment irresolutely. Discovery was certain. He could not remain where he was, as they were sure to investigate this corridor, which contained a noble piece of tapestry. There was only one way out of the difficulty. He turned quickly, ascended the little flight of steps, and walked into the room where the Colonel at the instant was elaborately explaining the antiquity of a certain carved oak table. Hearing his step, they forgot the black old carvings in surprise at the intrusion. The Colonel was disconcerted.

"Your roy——," he began, but the Prince, anticipating such an address, drowned the words in an exclamation of greeting to the ladies. "Ah," he said, "I am delighted to find you at last. I have looked everywhere for you." He glanced warningly at the Colonel, who had now caught his breath and assumed very badly a conspicuous indifference.

"It is a pleasure we did not dream of, Mr. Scott," said Miss Barrington. "I am

afraid you have inconvenienced yourself and Colonel von Meyer has been extremely kind. We are so grateful for your intercession."

"It was nothing at all," protested Roland. "I wish I might have done something really hard—had a new wing built for you or resurrected buried treasures or supplied a skeleton to each dungeon."

"Oh, we are satisfied with this. The castle is enchanting. And you are quite remarkable enough as it is," she added with that wonderful slow smile of hers. "I go for a morning ride in Central Park and meet you at the first turn of the path. I go sight-seeing on the other side of the world and meet you in a royal palace. What is the mystery? You dropped down just now like a wizard. Or are there trap-doors leading from musty secret passages in this exciting old room?"

"You may find anything in Rheinwald," returned Roland. "There are too many hidden passages and unsuspected doors. But I came up a prosaic stairway for the

purpose of assisting Colonel von Meyer in his task as guide."

The Colonel was obviously astonished, but he could only submit. He would have liked to remonstrate. It seemed too dangerous a mission for this stalwart young fellow with the big, eloquent eyes. For her also there was danger, he felt as he looked from one to the other. He wished that he could intervene and keep them apart, but he vaguely recognized a situation that was beyond his tact. He looked on helplessly while the Prince led Miss Barrington to a window to show her the valley and the great sweep of the mountains that bounded it. Roland stood with his back to it as he talked to her, and somehow it was borne in upon the Colonel that the talk was not all about the view. He tried awkwardly to make Mrs. Gerard join them, but at that moment she was too much interested in the tapestries, which were a fad of hers, to remember her duties as chaperon. She led him and Miss Rand into the corridor,

where the Prince had been caught, to examine the priceless bit of Gobelin that hung there.

For the moment Roland was left alone with Katherine. "Do you know," he was saying very softly, "it seems incredible that this is only the fifth time we have been together. You are a part of everything now. I can't imagine what it was like without you. Yet during all the years before that day in New York things must have happened. You must have lived and had friends and met adventures—and I had no share in them."

She had been looking off over the valley, but at this she raised her eyes and there was a mist in them. It made his heart jump. "They seem so far away," she answered quite simply. Her voice was low, but there were thrilling cadences in it. "Sometimes I think it was another life which will never come back. Sometimes—well, I don't care whether it does or not."

Roland looked down at her and

breathed deep. "Let it all go," he said slowly. "Let it go."

Mrs. Gerard drew aside the curtain and came into the room.

"Katherine," she said with some excitement, "you must not miss this wonderful piece of Gobelin. I believe it is the finest of them all. It is remarkable, Mr. Scott," she added as the girl reluctantly turned to follow her, "that such a collection is not better known. I never even heard of it. When my niece suggested Oberholtz I actually tried to make her go to Vienna instead."

Roland silently followed her into the corridor and listened abstractedly to her laudatory chatter. When they left the tower he found that all parts of the castle had been explored with the exception of the Prince's private apartments. To Roland there was a curious sense of warmth and happiness in showing Miss Barrington the rooms where he lived. They had never seemed so beautiful to him or so complete. He looked at them from a

new point of view, and with a new enthusiasm. Everything was enriched for him by her little phrases of surprise and admiration.

"And where is the Prince himself during all this time?" asked Miss Barrington as they were leaving his apartments.

"Some time ago," answered Roland, "I was told that his royal highness was at work in his study."

"Wouldn't it be exciting to see him?" she exclaimed, "if only we need not be discovered. This is all so wonderful that he must be worth while, even if he is a prince. I confess that he appeals to me more strongly as the owner of this ancient castle than as the high and mighty ruler of Altenburg. Are you very sure that he is quite like other men? Or is he really only a myth?"

"Sometime you may have a chance to judge for yourself," answered Roland, trying to speak lightly. To him the little journey through the rooms had not given everything. He would have liked some-

thing more intimate, more personal. Yet there were compensations. There were moments at her side, there was a look of appeal now and then, or of confidence. And at parting there was something electric in the pressure of her hand and the light in her eyes.

After they had gone, the old castle seemed bleak enough. The warmth had gone out of Roland's heart. It all seemed too unreal. He wondered if it could really be true that Katherine Barrington had been a guest at Rheinwald, that she had sat at his table, and looked out upon the valley that he loved. The memory of it melted away from him like a vision, and his whirling brain tried in vain to call it back.

XII

Felzenbruck Plays to Win

ROLAND turned with a sigh to his desk, and for a time he sat with his head buried in his hands. He was interrupted by the opening of the door to admit the lord chamberlain.

"The envoy from his royal highness, the Prince of Felzenbruck," he said, "awaits your pleasure, Sire."

Summoned suddenly from his reverie, Roland forced himself to remember his duty to his country. He went at once to the audience room where he was awaited by the envoy and the members of his own cabinet.

At first the interview consisted of diplomatic platitudes, expressions of hope for everlasting friendship between the two countries, and an interchange of flatteries. But the real question would not long be kept back. Arbitration had failed to

effect a settlement of the boundary dispute, and the envoy had been sent to sound Prince Roland in regard to his position in the matter.

"The joint commission has failed to agree as to the boundaries, your royal highness," declared the envoy from Felzenbruck, "and the matter has been referred to my royal master and to your royal highness for adjustment. Happily the contemplated alliance between the two houses will make this an easy task."

"You refer to the marriage of her royal highness, the Princess Theresa, and myself?"

"Such a union would unite the two nations by bonds stronger than friendship," put in von Becker, "and make the interests of one country practically the interests of the other."

The question Prince Roland had avoided for months must now be settled. It seemed impossible to face it squarely. He temporized, ignoring von Becker. "I think you exaggerate the effect of such

an arrangement," he said, "upon the question at issue. I cannot believe that it would smooth matters over so easily. The justice of our position would not be changed by it, and it is probable that the arrogance of your commissioners would return as soon as their congratulations had been offered."

The envoy drew himself up in surprise and von Becker was visibly alarmed.

"You forget, Sire," said the former, "that their attitude toward the consort of her royal highness, the Princess Theresa, who is the idol of our people, would be entirely different from that toward an independent ruler."

But the Prince was not to be turned from his course. "Nevertheless," he continued in open defiance of precedent, "human nature is human nature, and one does not like a man's opinion any better for taking him into the family. I do not care to place my country in a position where things will be granted as a favor that are not granted as a right."

The envoy was silent, and after an instant the Prince continued: "It is not pleasant to seem ungallant, but may I ask what alternative is offered?"

A thunderbolt would not have caused greater surprise. Von Becker did not conceal his consternation, and the envoy from Felzenbruck turned white.

"I am not prepared, Sire," he said with a touch of scorn, "for such a contingency. I was given no instructions about an alternative."

"His royal highness, Prince Friedrich, merely wishes to announce the date of the marriage," expostulated von Becker, not believing that he had heard Roland correctly. "It is necessary to conciliate public opinion."

"Do not misunderstand me, gentlemen," the Prince said with firmness. "I am suggesting that this alliance may not be the best thing for either country."

"But your royal highness cannot mean to repudiate this betrothal, which has been known to the world and hailed with

delight by the people of both nations," put in one of his ministers.

"You know, gentlemen, that this betrothal was conceived by her royal highness' father and by my late uncle, and"—Roland wished to leave no doubt as to his attitude—"neither she nor I had any voice in the matter."

"But have you considered, Sire, the position in which her royal highness would be placed?" asked the envoy from Felzenbruck.

"Such an affront is,—pardon me, Sire," added von Becker, "but it is inconceivable."

Roland ignored his counselor's remark and spoke to the envoy. "It is possible that she, too, may have an opinion on the question at variance with her father's desires," he said. "I recognize her right to follow her own inclinations. She may not care to offer herself as a sacrifice."

"Her royal highness will do her father's bidding," said the envoy.

"God 'elp her," thought Roland, real-

izing out of the depths of his own suffering that the Princess was human and to be pitied.

Von Becker pleaded with him and endeavored to impress upon him the gravity of the situation.

"There can be no alternative but war, your royal highness," he said in his ear. "If this interview were known it would be in itself a virtual declaration of war."

"Is it the wish of your royal highness that I should ask for instructions in this emergency?" asked the envoy from Felzenbruck, knowing only too well how Prince Friedrich would receive the information.

Roland began to realize that the interview might have disastrous consequences if it were reported to the Prince of Felzenbruck. His point of view had always been misunderstood by these politicians, encrusted with prejudice, hardened into a fixed purpose. His position would be distorted and his ideas twisted into an affront. He was not quite sure, indeed,

that he was guiltless. He felt that he had made an awkward blunder, but he was confident of his ability to adjust it.

"The boundary question has been referred to your royal master and myself," he said after a pause, "and it will be the more easily settled by a personal interview. I beg that our talk this morning may be regarded as confidential. Convey to his royal highness, the Prince of Felzenbruck, my most cordial salutations and tell him that I shall give myself the honor of waiting upon him at any time and place that he may designate. If one week from to-day is consistent with his engagements, it will be satisfactory to me."

"One week from to-day," echoed the other.

The envoy withdrew somewhat dissatisfied with the result of his mission, but distinctly relieved by the impression he gained that Prince Roland had reconsidered his extraordinary position.

For an hour Roland fought the depression which was heavy upon him. He

had failed utterly at an important crisis. He had shown himself insolent and arrogant where he should have been conciliatory. It seemed like the end of things—this plan. Evidently he was but a puppet, to dance when his counselors piped and laugh when they gave the signal. They offered him up as a sacrifice as easily as though he were a leaden image. Had they made his life so happy for him that they thought he loved the bondage? Did they fancy that he was longing for more chains? If he were only sure that the people demanded it—his people, whom he pitied and admired and hoped to help—it would be easier. For them he would make the sacrifice. It would be hard, but he would make it eagerly. But for these politicians—what was the use? They might be entirely wrong in thinking it the right thing to do. It might mean a complete surrender of his country and his ideals. The sturdy little province had lived for centuries independent of the mightier nations around it. Like a

David, weak and fearless, it had kept its integrity against strength and greed. In happy seclusion its destiny had been worked out. It seemed like surrender to join forces now with its hereditary rival. It was as if he had been bribed to keep the peace and allow the rights of his people to be forgotten. It was mediæval.

There must be some other way out of the dilemma. He came back to that. Yet he searched his mind in vain for one. He went over the details of the controversy—the agitation in Felzenbruck over the strip of land suddenly rendered valuable through the discovery of coal, the ridiculous claim that their boundary lay on the river instead of twenty miles to the east, the distrust that had arisen in Altenburg, the revolt of the residents of the strip against the claims of Felzenbruck. The whole thing was so unfair that it seemed like a comedy. But it threatened to change at any moment into tragedy. The very absurdity of the claim made it dangerous, for the people

of Felzenbruck were notoriously deficient in a sense of humor. The ridicule of the Oberholtz newspapers had eaten into them like fire.

One way out had been made plain enough by the courteously insolent envoy. Nothing else was as simple and effective. It came to him with depressing force. He might go far afield, but he always circled back to that. He had refused to eat dinner and he ignored his valet when Hugo asked if he might send him something. It was long past midnight when he finally thought of ending his vigil. Sleep, if it would come to him, might make his mind more alert in the morning. He had rung for Hugo and was impatiently awaiting his arrival when the door was suddenly thrown open to admit Colonel von Meyer, breathless and excited.

"Karl!" exclaimed the Prince in amazement. "What brings you here at this hour?"

The Colonel was breathing too heavily

to answer. He had hurried desperately, for his uniform was soaked by the storm and his face was red from the unusual exertion.

"What is it, Karl?" said Roland kindly. "Where have you been?"

The Colonel was not easily calmed, but he answered jerkily, "I should not have come, Sire. You are already too much burdened with care, but I thought you would want to know—they have gone!"

"Who have gone?" cried the Prince.

"The Americans."

"Gone!" exclaimed Roland with a wild hopelessness in his voice. "What do you mean? Where have they gone?"

"They have gone to Felzenbruck and I learn that they are in the gravest danger."

"Danger!" exclaimed the Prince. "How can they be in danger?"

"I fear that the moment they have crossed the border they will be placed under arrest by the Felzenbruck authorities, who even now are shadowing them."

"The thing is nonsense, Karl. If you have not been drinking you must be insane. There is no more danger of their arrest than of mine."

"I wish it were nonsense," replied the Colonel seriously, "but the situation is grave. The ladies will be arrested as Altenburg spies."

"Spies!" gasped the Prince, starting forward and taking the Colonel by the shoulders. "Spies! You are joking, man."

"My information came from Captain Kleinhaus of the secret service," returned the Colonel. "I brought him here so that he might tell you himself of the discovery. It was made too late to prevent the departure of the ladies from Oberholtz on the midnight train. Of course it is a trumped up charge, but the fact remains that the three women have been seized and are already on their way to the border."

Still Roland could not take the matter seriously. Even with the two coun-

tries already at war it would have been impossible, but now it seemed absurd and incredible.

"Kleinhaus says they were abducted by spies from Felzenbruck, who are known to have been here for a fortnight," the Colonel resumed. "He believes that they knew you had called incognito upon Miss Barrington, and the conclusion they drew was that she was in secret consultation with you. It was borne out perhaps by the fact that the ladies had come to Oberholtz direct from the capital of Felzenbruck, where they might have gained valuable information from the officers they met."

The Prince was for a moment speechless. "I begin to understand," he said at last, quietly. "I remember being followed the night I went to the Grand Hotel. They must have been watching me then." He touched an electric button and held it under his thumb for several seconds.

"There is no time to wait," he went on.

"I got them into this scrape. Now I must get them out of it." Roland strode to the table and, still standing, wrote on a blank sheet of paper:

"Supt. Oberholtz & Berlin R. R.: Hold the Felzenbruck train at first station. Do not fail. Have fast engine and coach in readiness at Oberholtz station without a second's delay. Speed is only requisite.
"ROLAND."

"Have this message dispatched at once to the railroad office," said the Prince, giving the telegram to the bewildered Hugo. "See that there is no delay and bring the reply immediately."

As the valet turned to go to the telegraph room of the building, Roland faced the Colonel again.

"There is but one way," he said. "We must follow them, Colonel. How far has the Felzenbruck train gone?"

"It is now 2:15," answered von Meyer, glancing at the clock. "The train is a fast one and should be now approaching

Leigwitz. Your order ought to be delivered at that point."

"And Leigwitz is one hundred miles from the border," said the Prince exultantly. "With a fast engine and the right-of-way, we can overtake them before dawn—yes, two hours ahead of the sun. If we leave Oberholtz by three o'clock, we ought to be in Leigwitz by five."

"While the ladies still sleep!" said the Colonel, echoing the triumph of the Prince. "What escort will you take?"

"One company of our best men will be enough, Colonel. The local police of Leigwitz will be able to place these two men under arrest, but a company of soldiers should be in reserve. Hurry, Karl, and give the orders. Wait! Before you go—does any one at the hotel know of this?"

"Only Miss Barrington's maid," answered Karl. "She was clever enough to give the alarm quietly to Kleinhaus. They were kidnaped while driving out for the moonlight view of the old moun-

tain convent. He has kept it from the hotel people."

The Prince uttered an oath under his breath. "Kleinhaus should have known in time to prevent this outrage," he said bitterly. "But it can't be undone. Get your men ready as quickly as possible."

Von Meyer strode away. The Prince had become a man of action—quick to decide and eager to act—with no trace of the evening's hopelessness. He made his arrangements swiftly and without a pause. Three or four servants did his bidding, each mystified and wondering, but asking no question—obeying with dog-like faithfulness and with the precision of trained soldiers. Felzenbruck and the Princess Theresa were forgotten. Katherine Barrington must be saved at any cost. He dared not think of her fate if he should fail. It was not possible to fail. He completed his preparations with an alert steadiness of purpose that commanded the respect of his attendants. His impatient demand for a reply to his

telegram was not answered until he was ready to enter the carriage waiting at the castle door. At that moment Hugo arrived breathless from the telegraph office, bearing a slip of paper, which the Prince seized and scanned. It bore these words:

"The superintendent of the Oberholtz & Berlin R. R. regrets to inform his royal highness that the ice storm of the night has felled the wires along the line of its railroad, and that repeated attempts to raise Leigwitz, at which city the fast Felzenbruck train is soon due, have failed. The last report received by the train dispatcher was from Bremenburg, twenty miles this side of Leigwitz. The train left that station forty minutes late, owing to the slippery rails. The superintendent has the pleasure of saying, however, that a special train will await the pleasure of his royal highness within a few minutes.

"SCHULTZ, Superintendent."

Roland gazed at this telegram in black

despair. It seemed as though his heart had stopped beating. For an instant his brain was paralyzed. Then he dragged his consciousness reluctantly to the surface, gave his orders to the footman, and jumped in. "It's a thousand to one against us," he muttered, "but I will take the one chance."

XIII

The Pursuit

ROLAND drove to the railroad station through the deserted streets of Oberholtz, filled with thoughts as dark as the night. He had ordered the coachman to urge the horses to their utmost speed, but with the icy roads and the cutting sleet, they slid and stumbled in a way to make the distance seem endless. At the station he found Colonel von Meyer waiting for him, and the company of soldiers already on the train. Von Meyer, much disturbed, had heard the news. Schultz, the railroad superintendent, was with him, anxious and agitated.

"Your wires seem always to be out of order when they are most needed," exclaimed Roland, as Schultz saluted.

"We are unfortunate, Sire, but we cannot control the elements," returned Schultz, astonished at his unreasonable anger. "The wires are down through no

fault of ours. The storm is unprecedented."

The Prince repented. "You are right, Schultz, of course. But we must overtake the train. That is understood, I hope. There must be no mistake."

"Two of the swiftest and most powerful engines on the road are at your service, Sire, manned by our best crews. The train is ready to start the instant your royal highness embarks. I shall accompany it, with your royal highness' permission, to look after your royal highness' comfort."

"Comfort!" retorted Roland. "Do you suppose I am undertaking this trip for pleasure? What I want is speed."

"Our utmost power will be put forth, I assure you, Sire," replied the superintendent, abashed at the strange ferocity of the Prince.

They were walking rapidly through the station as they talked, and the superintendent added: "The Felzenbruck train is a heavy one, and it is likely that it will

be much delayed, running without orders and through the storm. Our special, if it meet with no serious mishap, should come up with the other perhaps at Tarnowicz."

"Tarnowicz!" cried Roland in a heat. "Why, Tarnowicz is over the border!"

"Less than twenty miles, Sire," said Schultz, his wonder growing at the mysterious journey and the peculiar manner of the young Prince.

Roland looked at the man with blazing eyes; then restraining his impatience, he said quietly, "I must overtake the express this side of the Felzenbruck line. It must be done!"

Schultz, although feeling that the Prince was demanding an impossibility, was too discreet to confess it. He answered, "Every resource of the road will be strained to its utmost limit. But your royal highness will recognize that we work against great obstacles. With icy rails and broken wires, we confront many dangers in attempting such a run.

Your royal highness' life is too valuable——"

"I take the risk," interrupted Roland. "The express must be caught before it reaches the border."

By this time they had left the silent station behind them. The Prince had hardly set his foot upon the step of the train when the puffing locomotives started out into the darkness. For an hour the special toiled laboriously through the mountains, its tortuous and hilly path making it impossible to attain more than a fraction of the speed Roland so impatiently demanded.

"This pace will not overtake the Felzenbruck train in a hundred years!" fumed the Prince, starting up restlessly in his anxiety. "I could make better time afoot."

"You must not forget," replied Colonel von Meyer, his only companion in the coach, "that the express had the same wearisome mountains to climb before it emerged into the valley where the track

lies comparatively straight and down-grade to the border."

The two sat in silence, the Prince longing for the valley, and his faithful officer wondering about the result of their wild chase. Roland had not allowed his mind to dwell on this point. He had followed an irresistible impulse without a thought of consequences. Even with Miss Barrington safely back in Oberholtz, he knew not what course he would pursue. He only realized that through his deception of the girl and his infatuation for her she had been placed in danger. The fault was his, and the responsibility for her release was his also.

"This is all due to me," he said aloud to von Meyer. "If I had not lost my head, these Americans would have pursued their travels untroubled."

The Colonel sighed. "You could not by any possibility have foreseen this."

"No, and I cannot understand now how it happened. The charge against them is not serious, of course. It must be a

blind. But what does it cover, Karl? What can there be behind it?"

"There may be nothing," von Meyer answered. "They are a suspicious set across the border. They watch us like a cat and they do not look with favor upon what they call our eccentricities."

"No, they don't like me in the least," Roland agreed. "Why they should wish to condemn their adored little Princess to a life with me I can't make out. If I should marry her they would hedge me round pleasantly with a new set of restrictions."

The Colonel leaned forward and said very gravely, "But you must face them, my boy. It will mean great opportunities, and this is no time to shirk."

Roland rose and threw back his head. "I am not in the habit of shirking," he said proudly. "It is not a question of duty. It is a question of expediency. How do I know that the alliance is wise? You cannot be sure that it will not limit my opportunities instead of enlarging

them. In the long run the expedient thing is never wise."

"No, but this is different," the Colonel answered. "You have given your word—or your uncle has given his, which is the same thing for you. It is impossible to dishonor his pledges."

"It is impossible," the Prince slowly echoed. "I have no right to happiness. It's the price one pays for standing on this cheerful pinnacle. It's the sacrifice one offers for a power that crushes like egg-shells when you try to grasp it. I shall make it, of course, but what is it worth to me or to any one?"

"It is worth peace to your people," protested von Meyer.

"Peace!" said Roland, and there was a touch of contempt in his voice. "It will put off the quarrel possibly until the end of the honeymoon, and then it will break out more dangerously because it will be covered up with flatteries. We may as well see the situation clearly, Karl. I shall make the sacrifice, but it will be for

the politicians and not for the people. What do the people care? For a week the marriage will give them some sentimental pleasure. Then they will forget it. But if I should do what I like, if I should break away from traditions and show some genuine feeling, it would make me human to them and even heroic."

For a brief moment the Prince stood silent and there were visions in his eyes. Then he held out his hand and the Colonel rose and clasped it.

"I count on you, Karl," Roland said seriously. It was a moment that held compressed all kinds of possibilities—hopes and fears and dangers and difficulties. It made a bond between them against the world. But neither faltered, and it was plain that neither would ever forget.

Soon afterward the train emerged from the mountains and started down the long incline that led through the valley of Galenburg. The speed was now accelerated, and with each passing second the

plunging monsters ahead took the Prince and his escort faster and faster into the abyss of darkness, sending hoarse signals far into the night, shrieking, roaring, straining every nerve of steel to the desperate task.

"Ah!" exclaimed Roland exultantly, clinging to a support in the car, 'this is rather better."

"Glorious!" echoed the Colonel, hanging tightly to his seat.

"At this rate," continued the Prince, "we shall surely come upon the express before it reaches the dead line. It could not have crossed Galenburg at one-third of this speed."

"If we should overtake it at the present rate," said the Colonel, still more uncomfortable, "there would be small need of pursuing the chase further."

The speed became terrific, and for an hour the train thundered recklessly into space while Roland and the Colonel tried now and then to talk above the noise of the cars, but more often relapsed into

meditation. At length a sudden severe jolt fairly threw the Colonel to the floor and sent the Prince hurtling against a window, smashing it to fragments. The next instant the jerky vibrations of the wheels indicated that the air brakes had been applied with sudden vigor. The cars bounded up and down until with a groan and a final lunge the special came to a stop.

"It's the express!" cried the Prince, leaping up. They hurried from the car, and running forward along the embankment, saw not fifty yards ahead the red rear lights of the other train.

"Caught!" cried Roland, and shouted, "Well done!" to Schultz as he passed him. Hurrying on, they found that the Felzenbruck train was side-tracked at a little station. The sleeping cars were dark, but a guard stood on the platform holding a lantern and regarding with surprise the headlights of the special. A few hasty questions informed the Prince that the town was that of Czerski, a hamlet five

miles from the border, and that the Felzenbruck train had been stalled there for forty minutes, fearing to proceed further without orders.

Roland issued his commands swiftly. The company of soldiers was ordered to surround the express. The Prince and von Meyer and the captain of the guard entered one of the sleepers, the Prince explaining to the startled conductor that they were in search of three American ladies who took passage at Oberholtz, ticketed to the capital of Felzenbruck. The conductor did not recognize the Prince, but he realized that he was confronted by a man of rank and authority. He answered with deference, "I remember them. They left the train a quarter of an hour ago, your highness."

"Left the train!" gasped Roland. "Nonsense, man. Why should they stop at such a town in the night? I want the truth." He had seized the conductor roughly by the arm.

"I spoke the truth," replied the other,

angered by the insinuation. "I don't know who you are, but I will not be called a liar."

Stunned as he was, Roland could see that the man was honest. He released him suddenly and bade him speak. "As I told you, they left the train fifteen minutes ago. They came from Oberholtz in charge of two officers."

Roland and von Meyer stood speechless with wonder and disappointment while the conductor continued: "The officers had been riding in another compartment of the train, but on learning that we were likely to be delayed indefinitely, they consulted for a minute and then proceeded to the compartment of the ladies and ordered them to accompany them. Being officers, I could do nothing but demand their credentials, which were regular."

"Forgeries!" exclaimed the Prince in a fury. "You let yourself be tricked. Where did they go?"

"They turned in the direction of the hamlet, the women protesting against the

outrage. One of them, I believe, was for resisting bodily, declaring they had been guilty of no crime and should not be subjected to insult. Another of the young women, however, said it would be easy to prove their identity before the proper officers, and it would be useless to protest."

The picture brought the Prince to his senses and he rose to the emergency. Ordering a detachment of troops to search the train and make sure that the conductor had told the truth, he turned to von Meyer, crying, "After them, Karl! It is a race for the frontier, and they have half an hour's start."

XIV

Tracing the Runaways

THE sleet had now changed to rain, but the slush and water underfoot made the walking uncertain and the darkness was deep and impenetrable. Guided by the station master, the Prince and the Colonel, accompanied by a portion of the troops, made their way to the tavern not far away. Lights were burning in the windows and the hopes of the two men rose high, but only for a moment. The ladies and their captors, the landlord said, had departed not ten minutes before.

"The officers were much pressed for time," said the obliging host, "and would not wait for the refreshments I offered them. A half hour ago I was awakened by the sound of voices. I was no time at all dressing, and when I went to the door I found two officers and three ladies. I

thought they had lost their way and told them to come in. It's a poor place, sir, for ladies, but it was better than the storm."

"Yes, yes," said Roland impatiently. "You should have kept them."

"I tried, sir," the landlord continued, "but the men said they wouldn't stop and asked for a carriage. They wanted to hurry on to Dietz. I had only one vehicle that would carry them and it was much dilapidated, but they took it. They did not waste a minute in harnessing my two bays. My hostler was engaged as coachman and almost before I could realize it the whole party was off on the main road."

Turning to the Colonel, Roland said, "They never thought of going to Dietz. Returning toward Oberholtz is the last thing they would do. They are trying to throw us all off the track." Facing the startled hotelkeeper, he said sharply, "Are there any horses left in your stable?"

"One only and he is blind," said the landlord. "But my neighbor Schneider, across the road, can fix you up."

"Then saddle three of the best."

"But I do not know that Schneider would care to let his horses for so hard a pursuit. He——"

"Go!" thundered Roland, and asked an officer to bargain with Schneider.

The landlord, awed by Roland's command and by the presence of the soldiers of the Altenburg army, hesitated no longer but led the way to Schneider's stable. In five minutes more the Prince and von Meyer, accompanied by the landlord himself, were galloping down the slippery road. Von Meyer had persuaded the landlord to be the guide. In the interval during the saddling Roland had issued the command that as rapidly as horses could be procured, detachments of three soldiers each should be sent out on the various roads that led from Czerski, and the pursuit thus undertaken be not abandoned until it became certain

that the fugitives had taken some other course.

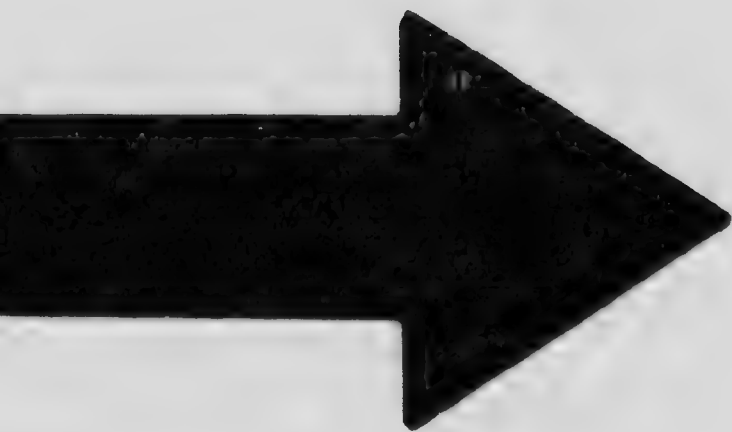
Roland and the Colonel, however, took the most direct route toward the border. The horses proved to be anything but trustworthy, and in the darkness that preceded the dawn the way was filled with obstacles. The landlord was by no means a reliable guide, his information about the road proving surprisingly in error. As a result the Prince was at one time thrown into the ditch by the falling of his horse, and had it not been for the water into which he plunged, he might have met with serious injury. The Colonel, too, was not without adventures, and the guide at last was thrown and broke his arm—a mishap that effectually put him out of service.

The gray of dawn was breaking through the heavy clouds when this accident occurred, and the Colonel left the injured man with scant ceremony at the hut of a peasant, having generously supplied him with money. The two pursuers made a

sad spectacle, the Prince in civilian attire, drenched and besmeared with mud, the Colonel in a much battered uniform, and the jaded horses hardly able to bear their burdens. In this condition the two came, in the semi-light of early morning, to a lodge at the side of which was a stone pillar bearing the inscription: FELZENBRUCK BOUNDARY LINE.

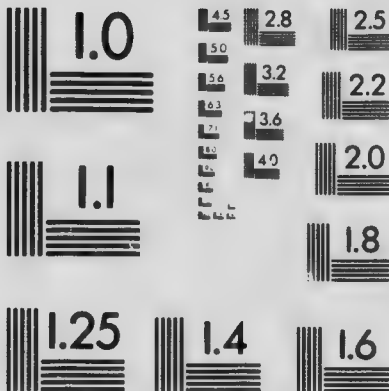
To the Prince and von Meyer it was like the inscription Dante saw over the gates of hell: "All Hope Abandon Ye Who Enter Here." Two soldiers in the uniform of Felzenbruck emerged from the lodge and demanded the business of the horsemen. Seeing the Colonel's uniform, they became more polite, but in response to questions denied that a carriage had recently-passed that way. The men looked at each other for one instant and Roland* was convinced that they were lying. Realizing, however, that an attempt to force a pursuit meant arrest, the Prince and von Meyer in deep dejection turned back and soon dismounted at





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the cabin where they had left the injured landlord. The poor man was moaning, and the Colonel himself set the broken bone as best he could and bound it up securely. The peasant served a frugal breakfast from his scant store, and while they ate, Roland and von Meyer, talking in English, discussed the situation.

"Of course the sentries lied to us," said Roland. "There is no other direct road leading from Czerski to the border and those fellows would take the surest route. They could not have been many minutes ahead of us. We must invade the enemy's country, Karl. We must follow."

"You would cross the border?" asked the Colonel in surprise.

"There is nothing else to do. But first we must hear reports from the men who have been scouring the roads. We must be sure of our ground before we invade the enemy's country."

Back in the town of Czerski, Roland received during the forenoon the statements of his soldiers who had gone many

miles in all directions in search of the fugitives. Their stories were all the same. But early in the afternoon the first definite news of the American women was received. It came from the hostler, Hermann, who reached home with the landlord's coach and bays, both man and beasts worn with the trip. It was as the Prince had anticipated. The abductors had made all haste for the border, evidently fearing pursuit. They had passed the border and driven toward the southwest to a tavern, where Hermann had been dismissed. He had remained there for some time to rest his team before beginning his homeward trip, and while he waited the two officers with the ladies had departed in another conveyance, the destination of which he did not learn.

That evening the wind shifted to the north and the slush and water froze deep, leaving the surface of the earth a glare of ice. When the darkness had fairly set in, the Prince and the Colonel, having been refreshed by a few hours of much

needed sleep, left Czerski on foot under guidance of a native of the place, who possessed a minute knowledge of the country. The men might have passed unrecognized even on the streets of Oberholtz, so altered was their appearance. Both were dressed as peasants.

They took a cross-cut over the fields, avoiding roads as much as possible, thankful that the sudden cold had made such a course possible. There was little conversation, but the three men steadily pursued their way, mile after mile, keeping an even pace, neither hurrying nor lagging. The border was safely passed in a lonely stretch of wood, dark and deserted by such police as were on duty in the vicinity. Roland felt his heart beat fast as the guide whispered to him that they were now in Felzenbruck. For hours the three tramped on, shunning settlements, making wide detours to avoid peasants' houses, passing over fields, through black forests, across frozen streams, now climbing steep hills, now

descending into gullies. Everywhere was ice, ice, ice, and after a while the stars, shining through the breaking clouds, reflected their distant splendor in a million dancing, gleaming beams. It was a beautiful night, but cruelly cold and treacherous.

At midnight the party reached the tavern where Hermann had left the Americans and their captors. They engaged rooms and retired, deeming it wise to go about their enterprise with the utmost discretion and in no unseemly haste. Otherwise, as they well knew, discovery awaited them and certain failure.

Roland, being very weary after his long tramp in the frosty air, was quite ready to seek rest in the comfortable looking bed. His anxiety had grown into a sentiment none the less deep because it lacked the impetuosity of the first part of the pursuit. His mind was now settled into a fixed resolve, yet the excitement had passed. He knew that the desperate exploits that might await him demanded

that he keep himself in good condition and fortify himself with sleep.

The room and its appointments were severely plain. By the light of his candle Roland observed that besides the door leading into the corridor there was another door, evidently opening into an adjoining room, and he made sure that it was securely bolted. Having done this and given a cursory glance over the ancient furniture, he threw off his clothes and was soon drifting into the world of dreams. He had not yet reached the actual stage of sleep, when he became aware of the sound of voices, the exact location of which he could not tell until, rising on his elbow, he traced it to the room next to his own. Two men evidently had entered it and were speaking in so unrestrained a fashion that the Prince was instantly sure that they had been drinking. Disgusted at being thus disturbed, he once more sank back and resigned himself to slumber. But the loud talking grated on his overstrained

nerves and he discovered that sleep was no longer pressing. A sudden wakefulness had taken possession of his senses. He lay listening to the conversation, wondering impatiently how long it would last, when his brain suddenly grew tense and alert.

"It is said they are Americans," one of the men had remarked, "and God, Fritz, weren't they beautiful?"

Roland bounded lightly out of bed, his hands clenched, his teeth set. But he subsided in a moment and sat listening on the side of the bed, every nerve at its utmost tension.

"Champagne has made you sentimental to-night, Louis, though I do not deny that they were lovely. But what should beauty have to do with the punishment of spies? If they are guilty, I say chop off their heads, beautiful or ugly."

"And suppose they were not spies at all," said Louis, more susceptible or more generous than his companion. "Suppose some officers simply liked their looks and

wanted to have a good time. What do you say to that?"

The other laughed boisterously and slapped his companion roughly on the back. "Come, come, man, you are drunk. It's time for bed," he said.

"I am no more drunk than you are," retorted Louis, sticking to his point with the obstinacy of a man in his cups. "I do not say that these girls are not spies, but the other thing does happen. There was old General Bulski, for instance. Don't you remember how he kidnaped a German girl that he fancied?"

"And a merry chase she led him, too! But no Felzenbruck officer would dare take American women on Altenburg soil and bring them here on such an errand. It's a very different matter. Even a man in love has more sense than that. No, Louis, mark my word, these women are guilty or they would not have been here to-day."

"Have it as you will, then," said Louis petulantly. "If you say they are guilty,

why, of course they are, that's all. But I'll bet that, guilty or innocent, the two young ladies will not easily get out of the clutches of Count Zito. As to the old one, I don't know. Perhaps he will offer her a place as housekeeper."

The Prince, sitting on his bed in the dark, heard these words with strange emotion. Here, before he had been the guest of the tavern for half an hour, Providence had thrown in his way the information he so eagerly sought. These drunken officers had bawled in his ear the news that he would have paid a fortune or dared impossible feats to possess. But it was gruesome news. The name of Zito set him shuddering.

"He would have no trouble finding husbands for the damsels," answered Louis' comrade. "The bidding would be high."

Roland gritted his teeth but kept silent.

"Old Zito would marry them both if he could—he's the very devil himself."

"Shut up!" interrupted the other in a hoarse whisper, even more penetrating

than Louis' words had been. "It'll be off with our heads if any one hears you."

Louis appeared to be impressed and said no more. His companion, however, taken with the idea that the conversation might have been overheard, put his ear to the keyhole of the door to the adjoining room. Being slightly unsteady, he bumped his head on the panel with a loud crack and swore violently. "Beg pardon!" he called out. "Did I disturb you?"

Roland made no reply, but instead breathed loud and deep as if in slumber.

"The room is occupied," said the Felzenbruck officer after listening for a while, "but whoever he is, he's sleeping like a sentinel on duty."

It was not long before the conversation stopped and the drunken officers slept. But Roland was wide-awake. Every nerve was tingling. He lay back on his bed, staring up at the darkness, a thousand wild plans forming in his mind. The news had surprised and horrified him. He had expected to find the

women at some military post under guard, but suffering no personal affront. The knowledge that they were at Castle Stanek, in the hands of the notorious Count Zito, filled him with rage and alarm. He could not see how it had happened. Why had her captors hastened past at least two military posts, where they might have lodged their prisoners, and proceeded to Stanek, the stronghold of the Count whose name was a byword throughout Europe?

Roland racked his brain as he lay there, trying to find a motive for this vagary and to work out a means of thwarting it. The hours dragged by, each seeming an age to the sleepless Prince. Though wild with desire to be up and off, he dared not for Katherine's sake direct attention to himself by any disturbance or by an unexplained disappearance. Morning broke at last, a dismal, cold and cheerless morning, bearing little hope to the exiled Prince of Altenburg.

XV

Castle Stanek

THE old Castle of Stanek stood in a forest, surrounded by a vast estate, much of it rough, rocky and untillable, but partially settled by peasants who derived a precarious living from the stony soil after paying the heavy rents demanded by the Count. The castle itself was ancient and fallen into decay. It was occupied only occasionally by its profligate owner, when some fancy of his wandering career took him there. At other times he roamed through the capitals of Europe and Asia, leaving a trail of scandal which had made the name of Zito notorious. He had fought many duels, been desperately wounded, and more than once killed his adversary. His entanglements with women of noble families had made him a terror in several courts, and his fearless disregard of dis-

grace had earned for him a reputation which made him dreaded.

The Count had lived a life which would have killed most men. Although he was not yet fifty, his fierce mustache and imperial were white as snow. His hooked nose, square chin and piercing gray eyes made one wonder what power such a man could exert over women. But those who knew him were well aware of the insidious fascination he possessed. Brilliant in conversation, winning in his gallantries, daring in his attentions, contemptuous of rivals, Count Zito seemed to hold a charm which women could not resist. He had never married, but he had broken scores of hearts.

The Americans could hardly have fallen into more pitiless hands. It was in his half-ruined castle that they were now incarcerated, with a pretense of law to hold them there, and only two men to attempt succor.

On the following afternoon the Prince and the Colonel left the tavern and

walked in the direction of Stanek. No definite plan had been arranged; any scheme seemed bold beyond the bounds of possibility. Yet remembering the vow they had taken, they were prepared to attempt the impossible—to die, if need be, in its accomplishment. Appeal to the authorities was not to be considered. Interference on the part of Altenburg would only have the effect of strengthening the evidence against the Americans. Any formal demand on Felzenbruck by the Prince of Altenburg was certain to be met with rebuff, ridicule and failure. It was either diplomacy, which would mean delay and possible defeat, or a resort to strategy. Delay was intolerable, for to leave Miss Barrington in the power of Zito even for a day was more than Roland could endure. Strategy, therefore, was the only resource, but the difficulties of applying it seemed insurmountable.

Finding shelter in a peasant's cottage a mile from the castle, Roland and von

Meyer waited for the night to shield a preliminary reconnoiter. The peasant himself was a simple, affable fellow, and neither he nor his stupid wife manifested much curiosity. Roland drew them out skillfully and obtained much valuable information about Stanek.

"Count Zito," said the peasant, "has been in Stanek not more than a day. He had sent no word in advance and his arrival threw the household into great excitement, especially as many things had been neglected that should have received attention. The Count is not a gracious man to his servants, and his fury was something terrible when he beheld the condition of things. We all wondered what had brought him here at such a season, but it was easy to find the reason when a carriage arrived soon afterward with three women, two of them young and beautiful."

"And who are these visitors?" asked Roland with apparent carelessness. "No doubt they are from some gay court, and

seek a period of quiet in this solemn atmosphere."

"No," said the peasant, whose name was Szlapka, "it is whispered about that Zito holds them prisoners on a charge that they are spies from Altenburg."

"Spies from Altenburg!" said Roland, affecting surprise. "And why should Count Zito entertain them? Are there not prisons where such criminals are taken?"

"I suppose there are," answered Szlapka, "though I know little about such matters." He shrugged his shoulders and the Prince perceived that he had an opinion of his own which he did not dare to put into words. Roland sought unsuccessfully to draw him out, but fearing to arouse the man's suspicions, was forced to abandon the attempt for the time and turn the conversation to general topics.

The two visitors were fatigued and hungry, and Szlapka's good wife was pleased to provide for them the best her scanty pantry contained, especially when she

cast her eyes upon the shining gold coin which was laid before her on the clean, uncovered kitchen table. She hid the money carefully in her bosom and thereafter was ready to do instantly the bidding of her guests, anticipating their wants as well as her meager abilities would permit. It further pleased her when Roland took upon his knee her little daughter and told her a wonderful story—a story which in truth he had first heard as a tiny lad back in the royal nursery at Oberholtz. The Prince deliberately set about establishing these confidential relations, knowing that some emergency might arise to give value to his friendship with these simple people.

Without a direct statement, Roland let Szlapka understand that he and his comrade were traveling some distance further southward on private business. Finding the roads dangerous for horses, they had undertaken the journey on foot, a method which they found safer and more comfortable during the icy period. Szlapka

was satisfied and showed no suspicion. When the evening meal had been eaten and the peasant was attending to his cattle for the night, Roland proposed to the Colonel that as the night was clear overhead and the wind not too cold, they would do well to stroll over to the castle and see it by starlight. The woman gave them ample directions and they set off through the woods, bent on making the secret investigation that might enable them to formulate plans for the rescue of the prisoners. There was a well-worn path, and by the light of the stars they had little difficulty in following it through a ravine and over a hill until it entered a broad road that led to the castle's main entrance.

Here the pair made a detour through the woods, walking cautiously until they came to the edge of an opening where they could see the lights of Stanek twinkling from the deep-set windows. The Prince's pulse quickened at the sight, and then dropped like lead as he noticed the

formidable strength of the dim structure, rising cold and repellent in the night. What chance, he bitterly thought, had two men against the might of such a place? What chance had he and von Meyer against such a crafty, evil soul as Zito, whose word was law and whose law was merciless?

They were silent for some time, depressed and anxious. Then the Colonel whispered, "I believe the part of the house that is used by the Count is there where we see the double row of lights."

"God knows where the prisoners are, Karl," answered Roland gloomily. "They may be in a dungeon beneath the moat."

The Colonel was silent for a time, feeling the truth of the Prince's disheartening words. Then he whispered, "We must first discover where they are held. The servants love the Count none too well. We might bribe them."

"I have thought of that," answered Roland, "but it would take a long investiga-

tion to discover a vulnerable point. And it would mean that more than one servant would have to be let into the secret, with that added danger of betrayal. They hate Zito, of course, but he probably has them well cowed. No, Karl, we must do this single-handed."

They waited in gloomy silence, watching the shadowy outline of the castle, noting the lights in the windows and occasionally seeing a passing figure within. They examined every side of the building, keeping well within the borders of the forest and moving with great care lest their presence be discovered by the sentinel they could see at intervals passing in front of the light that shone at the main entrance. But there seemed to be some indefinable attraction in the double row of lights to which von Meyer had called attention, and in the course of half an hour they found themselves back in their original position.

"We can do nothing to-night," said Roland at length, speaking wearily and

with the air of a man without hope. "We must learn more of the interior of the place and try to sound the servants. I'm afraid it's the only way."

The Colonel turned abruptly and strode off through the woods. Then he stopped and faced about, waiting for the Prince to approach. But Roland still stood looking toward the castle, and something about the tense, immovable figure caught the attention of von Meyer. Hastening back to his side, he too cast his eyes toward the windows of the castle.

"Look!" said the Prince in an excited whisper. "Look, Karl!"

In one of the windows in the wing where the double lights burned there shone a red glow—so bright that von Meyer's first thought was that the castle was in flames. But before he could voice the impression the light vanished, leaving the window black. Within a few seconds the red glow reappeared, remaining for a brief period and again vanishing. Four times this was repeated, then blackness

for a minute, and a repetition of the whole proceeding.

For a time the two men stood spell-bound, watching this uncanny manifestation. Neither spoke, but both were possessed by the same wild thought—a thought that sent the blood leaping through their veins, a thought that fired them with an indefinable, heroic purpose.

"It is a signal," said Roland hoarsely after a moment.

"A signal indeed!" said von Meyer. "A mute, piteous appeal for help!"

XVI

Count Zito

WITH the appearance of the strange red light Roland's depression vanished. It was the stimulus he needed to condense his wandering resolution into action. As he watched it he knew what he would do. And he knew, too, that he could never have turned his back upon the silent castle with its possibilities of horror for the woman he loved. The burden of the adventure was now full upon him, and the exhilaration of it. He turned sharply to von Meyer. "There is nothing for it, Karl," he said, "but to go on. I must see her tonight. Somehow I mean to enter that castle."

The Colonel had learned the meaning of that intonation of the Prince's voice too well to interfere. "Then I go with you," he answered quietly.

But this was no part of Roland's plan. He spoke with authority. "That is impossible. Your place is here. Two would certainly fail where there is a chance that one may succeed. And some one must be here in case of need. If you hear nothing from me by morning you will know what to do. The thing is perilous."

Von Meyer was disappointed and showed it. "But I can't let you risk your precious life that way. Think what it would mean if things should go wrong. You have a higher duty, Sire," drawing himself up and saluting, "than this."

"Karl," Roland answered very solemnly, "I recognize nothing higher."

"Then God be with you, my boy," answered the other.

"Don't worry, old friend," Roland said more lightly. "I shall win out. Remember that you remain here until I return or until you are convinced that my plan has been discovered. Then act on your own judgment. Good-bye."

He was off, silently and swiftly. Making a detour to reach the road, he unhesitatingly approached the main entrance. Upon reaching it he was accosted by the sentry, who, though a servant rather than a soldier, was pompous enough in his uniform. To his question the Prince replied, "Is it possible that you do not know me? I am Weinrich—Michael Weinrich, one of your master's attorneys."

But the sentry was obstinate. "I do not remember you. I thought that Gorski had charge of his affairs."

"You deserve to be dismissed at once," replied the Prince sternly. "I have been here often, sometimes with Gorski and sometimes alone. I shall report you to your master. A good memory is too important in a position like this."

There was that in the Prince's manner which terrified the sentry. He was convinced that he had to deal with a man of power and he dared not antagonize him.

"I beg your pardon, sir, I'm sure," he

said. "The light was so bad that I could hardly see your excellency's face. I remember now quite well. I think his highness is still at dinner, but if your excellency will wait in the reception room, I am sure he will see you soon."

Not satisfied with the apology, he accompanied this important guest to the door and passed him on to the footman with the pompous command, "Show Herr Weinrich to the waiting-room. The Count has summoned him for legal counsel. See that he is treated as his importance merits."

Introduced in this unexpected fashion, Roland found himself before he was aware in the reception-room of Castle Stanek.

"I will inform the Count of your arrival," said the footman deferentially. "He is just finishing dinner."

"By no means," said Roland firmly. "I would not think of disturbing him at such a moment. I am in advance of the hour he mentioned. When it arrives I shall

ring and have myself announced. Meanwhile I shall remain here. Does your master still receive in the same room?"

"Yes, your excellency," the man replied with a low bow, "in the room just over this. When it pleases your excellency to be announced, a servant will be found in attendance in the anteroom of his highness' study."

When the man was gone Roland made a hasty examination of the dingy apartment. For an instant he thought of the possibility of capture. The day when he must meet the Prince of Felzenbruck was near at hand, and if he should be detained here, his rashness would involve his whole country. But his blood was up. Nothing could stop him now. He listened just inside the door, but everything was silent. Then he left the room and proceeded cautiously but rapidly along the hall. Roland had closely observed the course he had taken in reaching the reception-room and had mentally located it with reference to the window in which

the strange red signal had appeared. He knew he had two flights of stairs to climb and that the room he longed to reach was toward the back of the castle. He was lucky in meeting no servants, though he barely escaped two encounters. After he succeeded in reaching the right floor the task was not so easy. The corridor twisted in a way that bewildered him, and the number of doors seemed endless. Guardedly he tried several of them, but discovered nothing. He traversed the entire wing of the castle without seeing an indication of the thing he sought. The place was dilapidated and the odor of dust and mold sickened him. By the light of a few dim lamps he could see the cobwebs which indicated that this wing was little used. Once it had evidently been gorgeously decorated, and traces of its former glory were still visible. But now the tapestries were torn, the painted panels broken, and the woodwork bore the scars of a hundred years. But this ruin only served to convince the Prince

that he was on the right track. The wing was secluded and had lain neglected for a long time, but now it was manifestly not deserted. Some one was certainly housed in this lonely place or the corridors would not have been lighted, and from these very windows had come the strange red light which had shone across the clearing to the wood.

Roland was lost in perplexity when he became aware of footsteps, and before he could make a move toward concealing himself a figure turned a corner perhaps four rods distant and approached him. It needed but a glance to convince the Prince that here was Zito himself. There could be no mistaking that aquiline nose and square chin, that fierce mustache and erect, military figure. On the impulse of the moment the Prince turned to a door at the right, which he had opened without result, and quickly stepped within the dark room, which seemed bare of furniture. Zito had not seen the intruder—the light being squarely in his eyes at the

moment. Now he walked straight to the door of the room where Roland had taken refuge and entered it. The door swung back against the figure of the Prince, effectually concealing him, and Zito passed on, leaving the door open to allow the light from the hall to illuminate his way.

Roland stood breathless for an instant. Then he realized that what he had taken for an isolated apartment was really the beginning of a corridor, leading off at right angles from the hallway he had just left. Already the sound of Zito's footsteps as he proceeded down this passage was growing less distinct. It flashed across Roland's mind that the profligate Count was entirely at his mercy! He would be doing the world a good turn, he thought, to put him out of the way. It was a temptation that he repudiated—a gleam of primitive passion which was its own justification. It passed as he swiftly and noiselessly followed the Count. Down a long, bare passage the latter led

the way, and Roland saw that he had been deceived in the plan of the castle. Instinct told him that Count Zito was about to lead him to the end of his desire.

The corridor seemed filled with a deep gloom, and Roland heard Zito mutter imprecations against the servants for negligence in leaving it dark. At the extreme end of the passage he paused before a door, took a key from his pocket and inserted it in the lock. Roland was now so close behind that it seemed as if his presence must be felt. He had formed a desperate plan of rescue. With Zito in his power and the prisoners close at hand, anything seemed possible.

XVII

The Count's Petition

ZITO swung the door back and stood dazed and bewildered in the sudden light. On the table close to the window was a large lamp and behind it a curiously wrought fire-screen of red glass, which explained to Roland the glow he had watched. He took this in subconsciously, for instantly his eyes were fixed upon Katherine, who stood erect and defiant in the center of the room. To Roland she seemed too beautiful, too hopelessly inaccessible. He felt as though his heart would break with the need of her.

Zito entered the room with an air of assurance. "Good evening, little one," he said insinuatingly, "is this an illumination in my honor?"

Roland could have knocked him down where he stood. It was all he could do

to keep his wits together and remember that concealment was his cue. As Zito advanced into the room, he followed him lightly, his finger on his lips. Unfamiliar as he was with the castle, he knew not what danger he was running into; but luckily at the right of the door some ancient tapestry hung over an embrasure which served as a closet. Roland took refuge behind it, his eyes upon Katherine, compelling her to silence. She stood tense and frozen, except for a catch in her breath and her wide gleaming eyes. When Roland was safe in his hiding place, she coldly answered Zito's question.

"You enter my room again without leave." There was scorn in her voice and in her manner. "I am in your power. A gentleman would consider that a reason for greater courtesy."

Arrogant as he was, Zito had a certain skill with women. It gave him confidence that he could overcome her antagonism. He brought it to bear upon her. "You do not realize, mademoiselle, what it

means to me to see you. In my eagerness I forget even the ordinary courtesies of life. You have plunged me so deep into love of you that I cannot think. My mind is in a whirl. I know only that I must see you, that it is torture to be away from the light of your eyes."

Zito's experience had convinced him that a man cannot plunge too suddenly into such a declaration. He realized that the very shock of it, the confidence that it indicates is a force that many women cannot resist. But for Katherine, indignantly alive to all that was overbearing and all that was sensual in the man, it had no charm. She turned away from him haughtily.

"You will pardon me, mademoiselle," he continued after a pause. "Surely you will forgive an offense that nothing but your own beauty could have caused. It makes me unconscious of everything but my love of you. Never have I seen such loveliness, mademoiselle. To kiss your hand, to make you turn kind eyes upon

me, I would give this castle and all that it contains."

Miss Barrington flushed angrily under his gaze. "If you wish to please me, you have only to give me my freedom. Then anything you care to say I shall gratefully hear."

But her faith in human nature was not justified. "Gratefully!" the Count echoed with scorn. "Do you think gratitude is what I want? I would rather have you as you are than with such a dribbling sentiment. You are handsome, my lady, with that curl of your lip. But you need not think it will help you. One way or another I shall win. It would be best for you to marry me to-morrow as I suggested."

To Roland behind the tapestry it was torture to listen. He would have given his fortune to shoot the Count as he looked at her, but he realized that it would be a folly that would endanger the woman he cared most to protect. The hardest thing in life sometimes is to do nothing.

Zito's manner changed. "Sit down here beside me," he said softly, taking the girl's hand and trying to lead her toward a chair. "You know, dearest, that I could not do anything to hurt you. I love you too well for that. Never before have I seen a woman whom I longed to make my wife. I have waited through long years for this moment, mademoiselle. You will not be cruel to me."

There was something seductive in his voice which made Roland grind his teeth, but Katherine remained haughtily erect. "Cruel!" she echoed, and the eyes she turned upon him were flaming. "It is you who are cruel, Count. If you were telling me the truth you could not put me in this position. You would be more generous to me. You could not make me suffer like this."

Her voice had in it a note of appeal which seemed to Roland the most piteous thing he had ever heard. But it left Zito unmoved. "If you will marry me to-

tomorrow," he insisted, "you shall not suffer. I can give you anything, made-moiselle. You will have wealth and power and the friendship of great men. I shall adore you. Everything you can ask will be yours before the asking. We will leave Stanek behind us. I have three castles more noble than this, far more beautiful than this. You shall choose between them."

"All this is quite useless," the girl answered with a beautiful dignity. "Many of the things you offer me are already mine. And I have one thing that is better than them all—a certain liberty of choice. Nothing that you can give me has any value in comparison to that. And there is no possible gift that I would accept from you. Be good enough to end this interview."

"You evidently forget," and there was a sneer in the Count's smile as he answered, "that you are a prisoner, charged as a spy with betraying the secrets of Felzenbruck."

Katherine grew pale. "I know that you have conjured up some accusation," she said, "to get me in your power. I am not afraid. You have no proofs. When my friends learn that I have disappeared you will hear from our Ambassador at Berlin."

"Ah!" breathed the Count, "when they learn!"

"It will be sooner than you think," she answered.

A look of deep cunning appeared for a moment in Zito's eyes. "Mademoiselle," he said slowly and incisively, "you do not know me. You are a woman and you talk like a woman. You have not felt my power."

Katherine did not flinch. "I am not afraid," she repeated.

Zito's manner changed. "Why not face the matter squarely?" he said frankly. "The evidence against you, when known, is strong enough to convict you. You are in a desperate situation—you cannot realize how desperate."

"Then this charge is not known at the capital," Miss Barrington said, the truth of the matter dawning on her. "It was simply a pretext to make me your prisoner."

Zito cursed himself for having spoken, but he was undaunted. "It was a pretext," he said frankly. "I wanted you and I sent men to Oberholtz to get you. What they learned almost convinces me that you really are a spy."

Roland's temper, lashed and tortured as it was, could not endure more. He drew aside the tapestry to burst out upon the lying Count and throttle him. But the terror in Katherine's eyes as they met his was enough to check him. Yet the sight of him obviously strengthened her.

"You do not realize, mademoiselle," Zito continued, "the strength of the evidence against you. Your visit to the capital here has been investigated and it is known that you beguiled certain high officers of our army into telling you

secrets which their discretion should have taught them to keep to themselves."

Katherine laughed. "The things they told me had no relation to politics."

"It will be hard to prove that," retorted Zito, "with the evidence we have to the contrary. Your dalliance with these officers is directly connected with your private conferences with the Prince of Altenburg in Oberholtz."

"Oh, this is too absurd," interrupted Katherine impatiently, "I have never even seen the Prince of Altenburg."

"Do you venture to deny that you received the Prince in disguise at your hotel?"

"I deny it emphatically."

"Then it may interest you to know that we can prove that he entered your apartments at half after nine on Thursday the ninth. You are foolish to deny a fact. It will work against you."

The day and the hour brought the truth home to Katherine in a flash. She turned white and looked involuntarily at

Roland, where he stood half hidden by the tapestry, his finger on his lips and a light in his eyes. With an effort she gathered herself together and answered the Count, though her voice was low, "There is absolutely nothing in your charges. I beg that you will leave me."

"How can I, mademoiselle, when you madden me like this? Give me some hope for to-morrow. Tell me at least that you will be thinking of me after I am gone."

But Katherine was at the end of her patience. "Have you no pride?" she burst out. "Will you stay where you are not wanted? Have you lost even the semblance of courtesy? I thought I made it clear to you last winter that I never wished to see you again."

Zito was accustomed to such rebuffs and he often found it easy to overcome them. He looked at her long before he answered, while she flushed painfully. "How beautiful you are, mademoiselle!" he said finally, as though in a dream.

She threw herself into a chair before the table and covered her face with her hands.

He seated himself at her side as he went on. "With you life would be heaven. All this would disappear—this foolish frivolity, this restlessness. I could dream then. I could really live. And you, dearest, for you, too, it would be different. I can surround you with such luxury that the cares of the world will never touch you. There will be perfume and music and all the diaphanous things of life. You shall not feel the weight of a single thought. You will be guarded and treasured as no jewel was ever protected before. You will be one of the great ladies of Europe. Your title will be melody in your ears, and the homage of men will be grateful to you. Your estates stretch green and fertile through the loveliest sections of the land. Peasants will bend the knee to you and applaud as you ride by. A motion of your hand will be law to a multitude of retainers."

He rose and leaned over her pleadingly. "Do not throw it all aside for the sake of an old prejudice."

Katherine lifted her head from her hands and he looked into weary eyes. "Rather than marry you," she said quietly, "I would endure imprisonment and death."

Roland in his concealment felt his heart bound. But Zito for the first time seemed depressed. He stood before her repulsed, uncertain, disheartened. And while he tried to think what he should do, a knock was heard at the door. Angered by the interruption, Zito flung it open and demanded of the frightened footman, "By what authority do you come here?"

"I beg a hundred pardons, your highness," said the man, "but General Stanislaus Waketchki has just arrived with a message from his royal highness, the Prince of Felzenbruck. The General bade me find you instantly, since he has but thirty minutes to stop."

Zito turned fiercely to Katherine. "I

will give you another chance to consider," he said. Then he added softly, his eyes upon her, "Remember, mademoiselle, that I adore you."

He left the room, followed by the servant, and locked the door behind him.

XVIII

A Discovery

KATHERINE rose and they stood confronted. The impulse to take her in his arms was almost irresistible to Roland, but something in her eyes held him back.

"So you are Prince Roland," she said very gravely.

He threw back his head. It was hard to bear the reproach in her voice. "I have deceived you, I admit," he said, "but there was no other way. I am not ashamed of it."

"You have put me in a false position," she answered.

"It could do you no possible harm," he insisted, not without a certain exultation. "The danger was mine." He checked himself, remembering her predicament. "No one could have foreseen such a disaster as this. It is too terrible. It has

made you suffer. But it gives me the chance to save you, and that is worth everything."

Her breath caught in her throat, but she laughed a little. "It's a queer kind of chivalry," she said, "to imprison a woman in order to rescue her."

Roland could not even smile. He caught her hand in both of his.

"Miss Barrington," he said, and towered over her, "you believe me, don't you? I would give my life for you this minute. I would not have put you in this position even to hear you say you loved me. Not even for that," and he gave a quick sigh.

The girl's eyes softened as she looked at him.

"You are here now," he went on, "and I must get you out. I must get you out even if freedom for you means for me going back to my lonely prison. You will remember it of me, will you not, if it comes to such exile and wretchedness?"

She had fallen into a chair and he took

her by the shoulders with a certain ferocity.

"You must remember it."

"I shall remember it of you," she answered quietly, "whatever happens."

A light came into his face. He turned away from her. "We must work then," he said gayly. "We are prisoners together." He crossed the room and tried the door, but it would not move. Turning into the embrasure in which he had been hidden, he searched for another exit. Failing in this and knowing that the bare room contained no other door, he examined the windows with minute care. They were guarded with vertical iron bars, very strong and firmly imbedded in the masonry. Looking through them, he could not make out a single foothold above the ground sixty feet below. No bays or balconies offered a refuge. On that side of the castle there was not even a vine.

His search was swift, but so careful that it took time. At intervals there would be

a quick little dialogue with Katherine, but he did not allow it to interrupt his work. Once her curiosity was too strong for her, and she asked him how he had reached the castle.

"We caught your train on a special," he answered bluntly. "Von Meyer was with me. We found you gone and followed."

There was silence again while Roland began to examine the paneling. The apartment was large but bare. On one side stood an ancient rosewood bed upon a dais. A few chairs against the wall bore many marks of age. The floor, once highly polished, was now marred by a thousand scratches, and shabby rugs half covered it. Though some attempt had evidently been made to clean the apartment, the ceiling, on which painted figures were still discernible, was adorned with cobwebs. The lamp from which Katherine had improvised a signal light was a curious relic of bygone days, and the table that held it was decorated with

carvings that were sadly chipped and broken.

"Where are your companions hidden?" Roland asked sharply.

"If they have not been moved they are on the second floor of this wing, well toward the back."

The inspection went on with discouraging monotony. The fireplace seemed to offer opportunities and Roland sounded it on all sides for a possible outlet. "Your prison seems secure," he said frankly.

"I have searched it in vain for a way of escape," she answered. "The bars are too strong for me, and the door is heavy enough to defy a battering-ram."

Roland was still sounding the paneling. "Has Zito troubled you often as he did to-night?" he demanded.

"Twice," she answered with business-like directness. Then she weakened and her eyes filled. "It is too ghastly. He haunts me. I even dreamed that he came last night while I was asleep."

"Poor child!" said Roland tenderly.

"Oh, it was only a dream," she said, "but I can't get it out of my mind. I had been signaling for hours and it seemed so useless. When I finally lay down I was tired and discouraged. I suppose I fell asleep, though it seemed only a moment before this terrible dream came to me."

Roland had stopped now and was watching her anxiously. "Tell me what it was," he said softly.

"I thought," she went on, "that Count Zito entered the room through that battered panel in the wall. He carried a dim lantern and by its light he approached the bed very silently. I could not move. And when I tried to speak, not a word would come. You know it is that way sometimes in dreams."

"Was that all?" Roland asked with relief.

"Yes, except that he seemed to stand over me for a long time, terrifying me, almost driving me mad."

Roland turned toward the marred

oaken panel which Katherine had indicated.

"These ancient castles are curiously constructed," he said. "I'll try this again."

He tapped it here and there, fumbled with it, and presently it slid noiselessly back revealing within the wall an opening which extended downward into darkness.

Katherine uttered a stifled cry of amazement. The Prince grew white. "Zito was really here."

He bent low and examined the door by the light of a candle which Katherine held for him, and noticed that the spring had been newly repaired. Taking the candle, he slowly explored the passage-way. The ladder led downward for ten steps into a stifling corridor. On the first landing many footmarks were discernible in the thick carpet of dust. Two narrow passages led off from this corridor, but Roland ignored them and continued his downward course. On each floor he found several little hallways leading in

different directions. It was evident that there was a complicated system of secret passages, embracing many wings of the castle. But still Roland went downward, seeking the end. His search, however, was in vain, for although he came upon a door at the lower end of the passage, he could not move it and it was clear that it had not been opened for decades. He retraced his steps to the landing where he had first observed the footmarks in the dust. Following them along a passage, he descended another ladder, and came by a somewhat tortuous course to a low door, in which he observed that a new spring had been fitted.

Making sure that his pistols were ready for use, Roland bent back the spring and with the utmost caution peered through a narrow aperture. What he saw caused him to beat a hasty retreat, for not ten feet away, seated quietly at a table, was Count Zito himself.

XIX

An Encounter

IT REQUIRED but an instant for Roland to decide what to do. He turned again to the door, opened it and entered, quietly closing it behind him. Zito looked up from the papers he was examining, startled and alert. He rose quickly, ignorant of the identity of his antagonist, with the clothes of a peasant and the bearing of a prince.

"Who are you, sir?" he said savagely. He took a step toward Roland, but stopped when he saw a revolver leveled at his eyes.

"Hold up your hands," the Prince commanded in a low voice. "If you utter a sound, I'll shoot."

Zito raised his arms and glared at Roland like a maddened beast. His lips were purple and there were purple blotches on his swollen face. "Well," he

said after a moment, and his cruel lips broke into a sickly smile, "we can stay here indefinitely, I suppose."

Roland advanced toward the Count, and with his revolver pressed close to the man's breast, he removed one of Zito's pistols and threw it into the corner of the room. The second one stuck in the case, and as the Prince fumbled with it, Zito brought down his raised fist with terrific force upon Roland's head. The blow sent him reeling and he would have fallen if Zito had not grasped his arm in an effort to take away the revolver. Stunned and dazed as he was, Roland had presence of mind enough to cling to the weapon and strike out with his full strength. The blow went wide of its mark and the two men swayed about the room locked in each other's arms, struggling for possession of the revolver. Zito was the heavier, and as he bore Roland down in his huge, bear-like embrace, the Prince realized that his adversary was too much for him. He tried to turn his

revolver on Zito, but the muscles of his wrist were powerless in the grasp of such a giant.

The two were struggling before a huge stone fireplace. Chairs had been overturned and the lamp had fallen with a crash. Except for this, the struggle went on in silence. Not a word was spoken as they clung to each other and fought for an advantage. Roland was wiry and agile and he had been well trained, but the brute bulk of his antagonist was a crushing weight against him. He grew breathless as he struggled to hold his own. But he kept his nerve, and not for an instant did he feel that his was a losing fight. Twice he found a chance to put in a telling blow, and each time he followed up his advantage. But Zito's persistence was equal to his own. Roland could not down him. He could not make an impression upon the impetus of the Count's bulk. Gasping, he fought for life against this mass of flesh which did not feel his blows.

His active resistance had put Zito on the defensive, and the moment the latter felt Roland's weakening he grasped his wrist again and tried to turn his own weapon against him. Roland felt the barrel pressing his side and knew that everything depended upon his strength. With the desperation of a last chance he tried to jerk his hand free. At the same instant he managed to trip Zito, and both lunged forward toward the stone hearth.

They fell crashing among the andirons. Roland was on his feet in an instant. Zito's grasp had loosened and he lay quite still. The Prince looked down at him in bitter triumph, which changed quickly into a kind of horror. He deserved death if any one did, but Roland had no desire to be the avenger. He bent down and hastily examined him as he lay there, pale, harmless and repulsive. A bad cut on the back of his head showed that in falling he had struck one of the huge andirons.

Roland was glad that he had not killed

him, even by accident. Realizing that consciousness might at any moment return, he looked about for something with which to bind his adversary. The curtain cords were the only thing visible that could be turned into service. The Prince examined them and found them soft but heavy. He tore three or four of them from the hooks and hastily bound the inert Count where he lay. Then he drew the body from the hearth, constructed an efficient gag with his handkerchief and started to return to the passageway.

The paper that Zito had been reading caught his eye and he examined it. It proved to be a report from one of the men who had abducted the Americans. It was written from Oberholtz and acknowledged Zito's order that the women should be brought to him without delay. The writer said that he had not been able to find anything in the conduct of the Americans which would establish the crime that Zito hoped to substantiate. He would make the arrest, however, and

bring the prisoners to Stanek at the first opportunity. The frankness with which the charges against the girl were ignored would make the letter a valuable bit of evidence to the United States government in case of trouble. Roland folded it and placed it in an inner pocket.

XX

The Escape

MISS BARRINGTON uttered an exclamation of alarm when the Prince returned to her room. There was no time for explanations. He had been in a tussle, he said, but he was not hurt.

"Oh, I was afraid," she said, dwelling on the word with a kind of intensity. "You were gone so long."

He took her hands and looked down into the troubled eyes. "You did not think I could leave you?" he said, and there was something very gentle in his voice, mixed with something very strong.

Her eyes dropped, but he made her look up and answer him. "No," she said simply, "it was not that."

It was not much—her words, her look—but it was enough to make him feel exultant. It created a new world—a world

in which nothing was difficult. He could have carried her easily through the castle and out into the night, fearless of opposition. He could have dared any danger or suffered any defeat. Nothing was important now but this.

"I think I have found a way," he said. His voice was steady, but there was a light in his eyes. "You will be brave, and you must be very silent. There is still danger, but together we can face it."

"I am not afraid," she said, "if only you will not leave me."

It was almost too much for his self-control, steeled as it was by the perilous business in hand, but he only said, "I shall not leave you."

Still holding her hands in his, he told her what had been done and what was still to do.

"But you have not forgotten Ethel and my aunt?" she asked as he stopped. "We can't leave them behind—you don't mean that, do you?"

To Roland they were part of a shad-

owy background. Everything was dim but the girl who stood before him. It was with an effort that he recognized their existence.

"They shall not be deserted," he said with decision. "But you are the one under suspicion and most in danger. We have no time to lose. This is our only chance. You must come. I know you will trust me."

There was a mist in her eyes as he turned and led her gently toward the hidden door. She went without a word, and when she was safely on the ladder Roland turned to put out the lamp and followed, closing the little door in the wall. By the light of the flickering candle they made their way through the dim and dusty corridors. It seemed very close and intimate, this thing that they were doing together. It gave him an ecstatic feeling that she was dependent upon him alone. Once she shivered at the gray gloom of the passageway, and he carried her soft hand to his lips. It

was hard to keep his mind upon the work he must do.

When they opened the door to Zito's apartment they found him still unconscious. The room was dimly lighted by the lamp which hung from the ceiling. Softly Roland entered, and with a whispered word to Katherine noiselessly shut the door behind her. He felt her tremble—he imagined he could hear the throbbing of her heart.

"Courage," he whispered reassuringly, "there is little to fear."

They crossed the room and Roland quietly unlocked the door and passed out into the hallway. Not a sound could be heard and he beckoned her to follow. Pausing every little while to hear if any one was approaching, they slowly crept down to the hallway and then to the floor below. The passages and stairways formed a labyrinth, but the Prince's mind had been alert when he explored it and he knew the way. They reached the main floor and safety seemed well within

their grasp when they heard footsteps ahead of them.

Roland seized Katherine's arm with a grip that made her wince. "Quick!" he said in a commanding whisper. "This is the way." They entered an open door into what seemed to be a library. The windows were covered with heavy curtains. In an instant they had concealed themselves safely behind these hangings. The footsteps grew louder until finally they stopped in front of this very room. In the pause that followed, the darkness did not permit the Prince to see things very clearly. With his pistols ready for use, he drew closer within his shelter and waited.

Soon a man in the uniform of Felzenbruck cautiously entered the room, followed and evidently commanded by a taller and more powerful figure. The latter spoke to the first in a whisper and they advanced silently toward the table. As they came nearer, Roland saw that a pistol held against the back of the soldier

was the force that controlled him. It was a puzzling pantomime until the shadowy figures came within the circle of feeble lamplight and he discovered with a great thrill that the commander was von Meyer.

"Where is the other woman?" Roland heard him ask quietly.

"Follow me," the sentry replied in a frightened voice.

"You die if we are caught," the Colonel said, and turned toward the door.

Roland had remained quiescent, fearing that an unexpected sound would startle his friend and give the rebellious prisoner a chance to escape. As they turned to leave the room, he emerged a little and uttered the Colonel's name in a breathless whisper. It had an electric effect, but not for a second did the old soldier relax his vigilance. Addressing an abrupt command to his prisoner, they both wheeled toward the window where Roland stood in the shadow. Evidently the Colonel had not recognized his chief's

voice, for as he turned he drew a second pistol from his belt and with the left hand raised it toward the swaying curtains.

The Prince came into the room. "Put down your gun, Karl," he said quietly.

"My God! is it you?" exclaimed the Colonel in his robust voice.

"Not so loud," warned Roland, drawing aside the curtain and revealing Miss Barrington. "Take her out and I'll find the others."

"They are already safely out of Stanek and concealed in the wood." And with a fierce command to the sentry, the Colonel motioned them to follow. He led them through dark halls, down a narrow stairway, and at last out through a small door at the rear of the castle, the guide unlocking it with a key that he took from his pocket, and carefully locking it behind them. Making a detour to keep well within the shadow of a line of heavy evergreens, they hurried across a clearing and entered the thick woods. Not until

then did Katherine feel free. The strain of the night's excitement reacted upon her and she drew a sobbing breath. At the sound of it Roland caught her hand and guided her reassuringly. "Be brave," he said very tenderly, "it is almost over."

It was too brief a moment before they reached the clearing in the woods where Ethel and her aunt were cowering. They were given no time for rejoicing, but were hurried on steadily toward Szlapka's little house. It was but a short distance away, and they reached it without misfortune. Roland roused the peasant woman and made Katherine throw herself down upon the bed, while Szlapka took care of the others.

"You will have but a moment for rest," he whispered. "We are not safe even now."

Weary as she was with anxiety and excitement, she protested against delay.

"We can wait only for horses," he agreed. "Everything depends on haste. But the worst is over. And the best,"

he added, with hungry eyes upon hers, "is still to come."

He released the soft, firm little hand he had been holding and turned away. His confidence oozed away a little and a depressing anxiety succeeded it. He knew too well that the most perilous part of the journey stretched dark and ominous ahead of them.

XXI

On the Highway

WHILE the women rested, the Prince and von Meyer planned a campaign, easily agreeing that the simplest method was the best. The alarm might be given, they knew, at any moment. Their only chance was to cross the line before the pursuit could be organized. The allegiance of Szlapka, who was immediately sent in search of horses, was secured by means of bribes, though the mere sight of beautiful ladies in distress was enough to make him waver. Ramaski, the sentry, was coerced into helping them by fear of the Colonel's pistol on one side and the Count's vengeance on the other. The promise of money and a lucrative position in Altenburg gave zest to his change of front.

It was decided to make a dash along

the public highway and trust to Providence for a means of passing the guard at the boundary. Szlapka's covered wagon was requisitioned, his two horses made ready, and by three in the morning the little band had started on its desperate journey. The boldness of the plan might mean its success.

Von Meyer and the three women occupied the vehicle, with Szlapka as driver. Beside him on the box was the sentry. Roland had exchanged clothes with Ramaski, and in the uniform of the Felzenbruck cavalry rode beside the wagon on a horse that Szlapka had somewhat brusquely borrowed from an unwitting neighbor. A note accompanied by a sum of money was relied upon to appease his wrath in the morning.

Szlapka knew every inch of the lonely highway, and even in the darkness of the early morning he now and then urged the horses into a run. An occasional peasant's cart was encountered, but no special attention was paid to the hurrying wagon

when its military escort was noticed. The peasantry for miles around was accustomed to Zito's caprices, and anything strange was set down to his credit. Many were his tenants, and the feeling of Szlapka toward his landlord was the feeling of them all. They hated him with a deadly intensity, engendered by years of oppression and tyranny. So they did not molest the furiously driven wagon. They considered themselves lucky to escape its thundering wheels.

To Roland as he rode along, anxious, determined, unswerving in his purpose, there was but one point of joy in the little caravan. Now and then he could see Katherine as, her head on her aunt's shoulder, she dozed with the confidence of a little child, or as she sat up startled by the frantic rush of the horses.

Once the horses, already terrified by their driver, broke into a run and got beyond Szlapka's control, but the Prince dashed on ahead, caught them by the bridle, and succeeded in quieting them.

In the fear that they would give out before the barrier was reached, he ordered a slower pace. The Altenburg border was a good four hours away from Szlapka's hut, and Roland was in a quandary as to the advisability of attempting to cross it in broad daylight. A stop was made and the tired horses were allowed a few minutes' rest as the sun showed itself on the horizon. The Prince held a brief council of war with von Meyer, and it was decided to rush the sentries. The Colonel drew his pistol and stood ready to sell his capture dearly. The men on the box were again impressed with the consequences of recapture and Roland had no fear that they would fail him.

On and on the horses ploughed, almost unmanageable in their excitement. The road was now alive with peasants, and several times a collision seemed inevitable. Once a cart was overturned, but the peasant uttered no word of protest. He merely thanked the Virgin that Count Zito had not seen fit to run him

down instead of his cart. As they approached the border, the peasants with their produce for the markets grew much more scarce, the city being now far away and the sun high. In another half-hour they would be safe in Altenburg or—but Roland recognized only one outcome to the adventure. He meant to cross the line at any cost.

Von Meyer and the two men were given last instructions in regard to their duty in case of a skirmish, and then Roland rode on alone to see if the coast was clear. A quarter of a mile of open road lay inside the boundary line and it was hopeless to think of surprising the sentries. They would have time to watch the coming wagon and prepare for its reception. Roland therefore instructed Szlapka to hold in the horses as best he could and advance as unconcerned as possible. At a distance Roland could see that their appearance was the signal for excitement at the little brick lodge, but evidently only eight or ten men could be

assembled. He realized that their escape had been discovered and the guards warned. But the little caravan drove on as if no interruption were expected. Roland, riding in advance, saluted the sergeant who commanded the little guard.

"Good morning, sergeant," he said unconcernedly, adding with a wave of his hand toward the wagon, "I am escorting some friends of Count Zito's over the border."

"And we were waiting for you," responded the sergeant as he fingered a telegram. Detailing two men to stand at the horses' heads, he bade Roland surrender. "The wires were quicker than your horses," he added with a laugh, "and I am instructed to detain you here for further orders. It will go hard with you, Ramaski. A soldier's pay is poor enough, but to a few of us honor is still worth more than money. I arrest you as a damned traitor."

To Roland this speech was more amusing than to the real Ramaski, who

was shaking on the box. It gave the Prince a cue in regard to the sergeant's weakness. He realized that the odds were as a thousand to one against him, but he kept his head. The barrel of his revolver was under his military cape. Addressing the sergeant in a voice which only he could hear, for his men were ten paces behind, he said, "Come and take me if you can, but first let me warn you. My revolver is ready and the instant you order your men to touch us I fire."

The sergeant turned white and his mouth curved in a weak smile. "A pretty speech," he said, "but what becomes of you? You are now covered by six rifles."

"Do you think I am in a position to be afraid? My life is not worth a cent. I might as well die here as to be placed against a wall and shot to-morrow. The only difference is that now you die with me, my dear sergeant. We go hand in hand. I never liked a lonely journey." He leaned forward confidentially and urged his horse nearer the wagon.

"What do you say, sergeant? Do we die now, or do you send the Count a little message to say that we crossed the border before you received the wire? I see the paper is still damp."

He was now abreast of the wagon horses, and as the sergeant involuntarily glanced at the message, Roland rose in his saddle and brought his whip down upon their flanks with terrific force. With a snort of pain the horses, already nervous, plunged and reared and bolted at a mad pace down the road. The men at their heads were of no avail. Nothing could have stopped their furious rush. Down the road they tore and across the border to Altenburg soil. Some fruitless bullets were sent after them, and instantly there was confusion among the guards. Three of them raced after the runaways in an aimless endeavor to be doing something. Another started to mount a picketed horse, but bungled the work of untying him. The others stood stolidly waiting for orders, realizing that they were pow-

erless to molest the wagon now that it had crossed the border.

Roland had spurred his horse to follow, but in the midst of the confusion the sergeant was cool. He kept his wits about him and fired his revolver straight at the Prince. The bullet struck his mount and, with a lunge high in the air, the tired, faithful horse fell back on his side with Roland pinned under his weight. Another bullet quieted the horse, and the Prince of Altenburg, though unhurt, was overpowered and disarmed.

"I shall adopt your suggestion about the telegram," the sergeant sneered, "but I shall add that it arrived in time for the capture of the traitor."

But Roland's anxiety was not for himself. Until it disappeared in the distance, he followed with brooding eyes the swaying wagon as it dashed madly over the perilous road.

XXII

A Prisoner of War

ROLAND submitted to being bound without a protest. The escape of the others made up for any indignity, and he smiled with contentment.

"I like your assurance, Ramaski," the sergeant said, "but it won't be a laughing matter when you get back to Stanek. A fine target you'll make in the morning."

Roland had no fear of such a death. "You are quick to jump at conclusions, sergeant," he said simply. "I am neither a deserter nor a traitor. I am not even a subject of Felzenbruck."

"And I suppose your name is not Ramaski," answered the sergeant, "and you only meant this little episode as a joke."

"My name is Roland, and I am the reigning Prince of Altenburg."

"Charmed, I am sure," said the sergeant with a low bow, and then he roared with laughter. "Perhaps you are also Kaiser Wilhelm and the Pope of Rome. My poor lodge has never before been so honored."

"I am glad you appreciate the distinction," said the Prince with some bitterness.

"So highly, your royal highness," the sergeant with mock deference took him up, "that I cannot think of keeping you in these poor quarters. You shall return at once to Stanek, where luxuries worthy of your rank await you. Count Zito will no doubt upbraid me for not waiting until he could send the state coach; but perhaps your royal highness may prefer even one of our poor horses to a long delay."

Roland loftily ignored his heavy irony and hurried the preparations for the return as much as he could. He was soon mounted and on his way back to Stanek under guard of the sergeant and

three soldiers. The journey was made for the most part in silence, the sergeant wondering whether his prisoner was a madman or a prince, and Roland berating himself for his capture. He had no fear that harm would come to him. Once he had established his identity, Zito could do nothing; but he chafed under the delay. Only a few days remained before his appointment with the Prince of Felzenbruck, and it was an interview that he could not afford to miss. He knew that his absence just now would not create special alarm, for he had given out that he might be away for several days, and his eccentric habits were well known. Since he came to the throne he had more than once disappeared, sometimes going in disguise among his subjects, sometimes pursuing the hunt, sometimes making longer journeys to gratify a whim or to convince himself that he was not a prisoner. But he had always kept his word to his people, and if he should fail to appear at so important a moment the

result would be disastrous. He could hear the outcry that it would cause; for the cabinet would not be able to keep it secret, and he shuddered at the thought of the exposure. For Katherine it would mean much unpleasant gossip, and for himself the open criticism of the conservatives, who were never slow to attack him, and the veiled distrust of his adherents. It would be said that he was unequal to the crisis and had disappeared for the express purpose of throwing the responsibility upon his cabinet. But for the moment there was nothing to do but return to Stanek with as good a grace as he could muster.

By noon the towers of Zito's castle could be seen above the trees, and Roland was conducted at once into the Count's presence. It was the room in which he had left him bound and unconscious, and he enjoyed the limp look of him and the unbecoming bandages on his hard jaw.

'What! another vagabond?' asked Zito

without looking up, and swearing volubly with a certain nonchalant enjoyment. "It is the sixth that has been brought here this morning. With such service as you scoundrels give me, the prisoners I seek are probably at the other end of the earth."

The sergeant quickly explained the episode at the frontier, and added with a laugh that the prisoner claimed to be the Prince of Altenburg. Zito had paid but little attention to the unkempt and weary captive in the Felzenbruck uniform. But at the mention of Roland's name he gave him one searching look. The surprise and joy that awoke in him did not escape Roland, though the Count quickly controlled his traitorous countenance. The sergeant apologized abjectly for his failure to capture the women, and withdrew at Zito's command.

"Since you recognize me, Count," said Roland, "I beg that you will permit me to return to Altenburg without delay."

But Zito's astonishment had given way

to anger and he was by no means ready to release his prey. It was a pleasant little revenge for the adventure of the night before, and he found it an agreeable pastime to prolong the torture. The more powerful the victim the more cheering it would be to play with him.

"I know his royal highness of Altenburg well enough," he said with wicked eyes, "but I never saw you before last evening."

"Look closer, then, for it will fare badly with you if you do not recognize me."

"Do you think me a baby to be caught with foolish lies?" replied Zito sharply. "His royal highness of Altenburg is interested in the escape of these prisoners, I know, but he is much too clever a man to be caught in such a trap."

"He is clever enough to know what he wants," said Roland, with a little smile, "and now and then he gets it."

The effect of the cynical curve of the Count's lip was somewhat injured by the ludicrous swelling. "You think that I

shall really believe," he said, "that his royal highness of Altenburg is foolish enough to allow himself to be caught in this country in the guise of a Felzenbruck soldier? He would know too well that he could be shot as a spy."

"There would be a certain amount of noise, Count," he said quietly, "before that could happen. I am at least clever enough to know that you will not place your own neck in danger."

"And who, pray, would make the noise?" Zito replied. "Certainly not I nor my men, and as for you—well, you would be too far away to be heard. No one knows you are here, and if you were to disappear no one would be the wiser. Who would think of looking for Roland of Altenburg in Stanek? And you couldn't be found if a search were made."

For the first time Roland realized that the situation was not without its dangers, but he did not waver. A dry, sharp laugh broke from him, but he did not speak.

"Have you not committed a slight in-

discretion in coming here?" Zito continued. "You break into my castle like a thief in an attempt to rescue two women who are proven to be spies."

"Spies!" exclaimed Roland in a heat. "So you capture them with all legal forms and deliver them up at once to the proper authorities. Perhaps it is customary in Felzenbruck to issue warrants to kidnap prisoners on foreign soil. It may be that his royal highness, Prince Friedrich, will see things differently when the facts are made known to him."

"It is a lie," Zito broke in.

But Roland went on remorselessly. "Perhaps, too, it is the custom in Felzenbruck to transform a private castle into a prison for public offenders and coerce the guilty with offers of release and rewards into a distasteful marriage." Zito rose to the word and struggled visibly to master his temper. "Perhaps this is conviction and sentence by due process of law. I am not familiar with your courts."

Zito had gained control of himself in a

way. He laughed unpleasantly. "You are playing a very pretty hand," he said, "but I hold a better one. The whole story is a lie."

"You may as well realize," Roland continued tranquilly, "that there are two or three things that I happen to know. I overheard your graceful blandishments last night. And I have read the diplomatic report written by the man you sent to Oberholtz. It will have a certain value as evidence."

Zito dragged furiously at the bell-cord, but Roland deftly took him up. "Don't bother," he said, "it will be quite useless to have me searched. The paper is safely across the border. It shall be carefully preserved in our historical museum."

"You seem to have seen a great deal during your visit to my castle," Zito said sardonically. He dismissed the servant who answered the bell. "You may know more than I could wish, but you will remain silent. It would do you no good if the world knew the story of the love-

lorn princeling who was caught playing with fire and proposed to make war because he got burned a little." Zito laughed boisterously. "No, you will stay here as my guest until you surrender Miss Barrington to me. Then you will be escorted to the frontier and the matter will be closed. With one word you can secure freedom. Before night you shall be escorted to your own country. But I must be sure first that you will do what I ask. The conditions I impose are simple."

Roland smiled in disdain. "They may be simple, Count," he said, "but they are impossible. I prefer your hospitality."

"I shall not take your answer as final," said Zito, nettled at the man's indifference. He summoned the guard and Roland was escorted to a comfortable suite in the upper part of the old structure. He knew the character of the man into whose power he had fallen and realized that Zito would not stop at anything to gain his end. His exultation had vanished. He felt blind and impotent.

XXIII

The Jailer

THE locked doors and the tread of the guard in the hall were Roland's only reminders that he was a prisoner. His apartments were dingy, but they were furnished with a certain elegance. The dinner that was brought to him was excellent, and it was well served. He was treated with deference by the servants, and the guard did not conceal his admiration for the man who had ventured to defy the invincible Zito. During the afternoon he had been unmolested, and despite Zito's ominous threats he was not worried. Whatever his own fate might be, he could be patient in the belief that the Americans were safe in Altenburg. Yet when he tried to take comfort in it, he could see again the wild rush of the horses and the swaying wagon as they disappeared into freedom, and he wondered how it had all ended.

It was late that evening before the Prince was disturbed. He was trying to interest himself in a German novel that he had found, when the door opened and an orderly entered. He saluted and informed the Prince that his highness, Count Zito, requested the honor of an interview in his library. Roland's reply was more emphatic than dignified, and he took up his book again as the disconcerted soldier left the room. It was but a few minutes before the door was again opened and Zito himself appeared. His eyes showed that he had been drinking heavily and was in a dangerous mood. All his politeness had vanished and he made no effort to conceal his thoughts.

"So you disobey my commands," he began, advancing unsteadily toward the Prince. "You think because you are well treated that I will submit to your impertinence. I'll have you know that I am master here and that I mean to have my way. If you do not bring that girl here to-morrow, you will pay for it." He

smiled unpleasantly. "And you will not enjoy the price. It is for you to choose."

"The novelty of your threats is beginning to wear off, Count," Roland said quietly. "I have told you definitely that I shall send no message whatever to the lady in question. Do you realize that I am Roland of Altenburg? What kind of a coward do you think I am? If I am not safely over the border by noon to-morrow, I warn you that it will be you who will pay."

Zito stumbled into a chair and his face wrinkled into a puzzled expression. Evidently he had something on his mind. A crumpled bit of paper fell from his hand and Roland wondered if it had anything to do with his aggressiveness. He rose and paced idly about the room.

"Let us face this matter squarely, Count," he said. "Miss Barrington has already given you her answer. There is no power on earth which would persuade her to come back."



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(ANSI and ISO TEST CHART No. 2)



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1.50

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Zito looked up and watched the Prince closely, wondering if he were weakening.

"Write to her to come to you," he answered hoarsely. "Say you are in trouble. She will come if you ask her. Once she is on our soil, I can manage the rest."

He rose and fumbled about on the table for pen and paper, and while his back was turned Roland picked up the dispatch and read it. It changed the face of things for him absolutely. "Roland of Altenburg taken by our troops at boundary line," it ran. "Have him brought here at once. I hold you responsible if harm comes to him while in your province. Schlefel, by order of Friedrich, Prince of Felzenbruck."

To Roland the message meant more than his release. It told him that Karl von Meyer had arrived at Oberholtz and notified the authorities. It told him above all that the Americans were safe.

"I will send for a telegraph blank," Zito

said. "Write the message and you shall be free."

"Here is paper," Roland said. "We can use the back of the dispatch you dropped."

It was a moment before Zito grasped his meaning. Then he seized the message with a cry of dismay and tore it to bits.

"How soon will you execute his royal highness' orders?" Roland asked. "When do we start for the capital?"

Zito's brain was clearer now, and he looked at him with anything but friendly eyes. "You need not think that you can escape that way," he said. "A hundred such messages would not help you. Do you think I mean to let you live to tell of it?"

There was something in Zito's voice that convinced Roland that he meant what he said. His threats were more than mere bluster. It was evident that he was desperate, that he was ready for any wild deed that offered the smallest chance of escape from exposure. In spite

of his unsavory reputation, Zito had always maintained at court his position of honor. There was a limit to his audacity. No scandal was allowed to grow emphatic enough to endanger his influence. He held to the power that was his with a tenacity that was made up largely of cowardice. Roland knew of this trait in him, and he saw that instead of influencing him now toward caution, it was making him desperate. The Count was ready blindly to commit the greater crime in order to conceal the lesser one. Roland, looking at him, knew it was a battle to the finish. Yet he smiled with no loss of self-confidence and said lightly, "But fortunately you will be able to report to his royal highness. You have not forgotten, I fancy, that he will hold you responsible."

Zito looked at him sharply. "He cannot hold me responsible for a man I have never seen. It was Ramaski, the serf, who was arrested at the boundary."

"Friedrich is not a fool, Count. It is

possible that he may make inquiries about the man who claimed to be Roland. Your servants were present when I gave you my name."

"But they are my servants," Zito said meaningly. "They know too much to talk indiscreetly. You will disappear and any questions which might be asked will go unanswered. This is a dingy old castle, but it is useful. Things are pretty well systematized here. I give you an hour to decide. If you wire Miss Barrington as I request, and give your word never to mention what has occurred in Stanek, I will wire Prince Friedrich that you are my honored guest."

"And if I refuse?" Roland interrupted.

"I have given you the alternative." There was something grim and defiant in the face he turned toward Roland. "It is neatly arranged and no one will ever know. What is your answer?"

"This is my answer, you dog." Roland no longer cared to control his anger. Picking up his riding glove from the

table, he brought it sharply across the Count's face. Zito was on his feet in an instant, but his legs were still unsteady and he realized that he could do nothing in a personal encounter.

"Do you really think that I would put Miss Barrington in your power? Do you imagine that I came to Stanek for that? I would endure imprisonment and your most ingenious torture to keep her away. At the worst I would even endure your friendship."

The Count looked shrunken and old in his chair. Roland had thrown discretion to the winds. He seemed a giant in his strength, in his determination. "I shall do nothing," he went on, "and when this is over I will not be silent. You may dispose of me as you like. I am not afraid of death."

Zito made another attempt to stand, and with some difficulty succeeded in reaching a bell, which he rang. Then he turned to Roland with malice in his furtive eyes.

"I am sorry to part with so agreeable a guest," he said, "but you have made your own choice. It is a principle of mine to supply my visitors with everything they desire."

XXIV

A Royal Progress

IT WAS just at this time that a group of horsemen swept through the forest and, turning into the approach to the castle, stopped abruptly before the main entrance. Two of the aides dismounted at the instant they drew rein and stood ready to assist their leader in alighting, but he sprang to the ground without deigning to accept their assistance. He was tall and carried himself with a distinction that set him apart. He wore the uniform of a Felzenbruck general, and it was with the bearing of a man accustomed to obedience that he asked to be shown into the presence of Count Zito.

The servant, awed though he was by the distinguished air of the man, hesitated to violate the instructions of his master. "Excellency," he said, "the

Count has given orders that no one shall be admitted without his permission. If you will kindly send in your card——"

But the officer did not care to accept dictation. He brushed by the obsequious servant with superb indifference. "Take me at once to your master," he said. "My business cannot wait. Announce Field Marshal von Klener."

The name was important enough to silence opposition. The man fell back abashed and conducted him at once to the chamber where Zito and the Prince awaited a response to the Count's ring. The Field Marshal followed instantly upon the servant's announcement, and Zito's anger at the intrusion softened into an obsequious welcome.

"You do me an unexpected honor," he said with more than a hint of malice in his voice and in his salutation.

Von Klener responded stiffly, but he wasted little time upon the disconcerted Count. "I have come," he replied, "as an emissary from his royal highness, Prince

Friedrich, to extend to your guest the assurance of his most cordial hospitality."

Turning to Roland, who stood proudly indifferent to the course of events, he bowed low. "It is an honor," he said, "to welcome your royal highness to the Principality of Felzenbruck. I trust that every possible courtesy has been extended to you, Sire. Undoubtedly," with a little curl of the lip, "Count Zito has done everything for your royal highness that lies in his power. But my royal master, Prince Friedrich, feels that Castle Stanek is remote. At the capital he can give you entertainment more in accordance with your rank. He begs, therefore, that you will allow yourself, Sire, to be conducted thither with all speed. He is sending a special train and a suitable escort. With my order I came on ahead as a kind of advance guard to solicit your royal highness consent to this arrangement."

Robbily dressed as he was, Roland was unmistakably the grand manner. He stood perfectly still, accepting the

tribute of this deference as his due. When von Klener paused, he said, and his voice had never been so flexible and so richly modulated, "I thank you, Marshal. No man has ever had a more distinguished escort. I trust you will extend to his royal highness my deep appreciation of his kindness. It has come at the right moment. Owing to the rather peculiar circumstances of my arrival, I found myself constrained to prolong the visit to my honorable friend"—he smiled in the pleasantest way at Zito—"longer than was consistent with my engagements and the somewhat turbulent state of certain issues. It is perhaps as well that my royal cousin has given me this opportunity. I shall accompany you in the morning with great pleasure. Though, of course," he added with a ceremonious bow to the Count, "I regret deeply that I am thereby depriving myself of the society of my thoughtful and accomplished host. I can hardly describe to you, sir, his solicitous care for my comfort."

Von Klener took his cue from the Prince. "I am rejoiced to learn, Sire," he replied, "that you have nothing to complain of. It would indeed be a disgrace to Felzenbruck if you were not accorded every possible honor."

During these amenities Zito had remained quiescent, furtively watching his friend the enemy and looking desperately uncomfortable. When von Klener finally turned to him and said, "We are obliged to trespass upon your hospitality, Count, for the night. I hope that this may not put you to great inconvenience," it was with difficulty that Zito rose to the emergency. His assent was almost a grunt, but he finally assured the Field Marshal that the castle was at his disposal. He made an excuse to retire in the necessity of giving directions for their entertainment.

When the two men were left alone, Roland's gratitude to the Field Marshal remained unspoken until he had satisfied his anxiety about the fate of Karl and the

Americans. The soldier informed him that they had reached Oberholtz in safety, and that von Meyer had immediately begun negotiations for the Prince's release. The matter was explained to the minister from Felzenbruck, who in turn had communicated with Prince Friedrich. Knowing well that Zito was capable of any desperate act, his royal highness had sent von Klener on the mission of rescue. To the turmoil that lay behind this peace there was no allusion. Both were conscious of it, but both ignored it.

Early the next day the journey to the capital was begun. Von Klener had taken the precaution to provide a guard for the Prince during the night. He had seen, too, that he was supplied with more appropriate clothing than the battered Felzenbruck uniform which he discreetly avoided mentioning. Zito's coach was employed as far as the railroad, and with its distinguished-looking escort it made a clatter in the country side.

At the railroad, where the special train awaited him, Roland was greeted by more officers, by the mayor of the capital, who presented him with the freedom of the city, by his own minister to Felzenbruck, by two members of the cabinet and several nobles of the realm. He was surprised at the formality of his reception and rather aghast at its publicity. Yet he was ready of speech and there was a certain grace in his acceptance of it all. As soon as he could release himself from the crowd after the train had started, he took the Altenburg minister aside to inquire into the significance of this welcome. "How much do they know," he asked, "of my reasons for being here?"

"Nothing at all, Sire," was the reply. "The secret has been well kept. It is not known even to the members of Prince Friedrich's cabinet. I myself set this plan in motion to cover it up with a little bluster. I feared that something might be discovered that would be unpleasant to your royal highness. It was easy to man-

age because of your recent announcement that the conference would take place this week."

Roland drew away from him with hasty commendation. He had forgotten the issue, forgotten the decision that must be made. It confronted him again sharply. And he was no more ready to face it than he had been a week ago. In the rush of his adventures everything had been lost. His mind had been blank to affairs of state, to questions of policy. Now he must take them up, and it seemed heavier work than fighting Zito and facing death.

The Prince realized that his minister had planned matters for the best, and submitted with as good cheer as he could assume to the ordeal of traveling in state. His valet was on the train, and Roland was soon dressed in the uniform of the Third Felzenbruck Hussars, of which he was honorary colonel. Among his decorations he wore the red eagle of Felzenbruck which Prince Friedrich had given him at the time of his coronation.

Every station on the road to the capital was decorated with the flags of the two countries, and crowds had collected to see the distinguished visitor. Sometimes Roland said a few graceful words, sometimes he merely bowed his acknowledgments, but always the enthusiasm of the crowd was flattering. It would have been exhilarating enough if Roland's thoughts had not been far away from the cheering people. It was easier to face danger than applause. He had been happier with Katherine in the dark woods and peril in every shadow than now that it was he whom every one delighted to honor. Through it all her smile haunted him—the tenderness of it, its wistfulness. At times the thought of it brought his mind back with a start to Friedrich. What should he do, what could he say except that he would obey the will of his countrymen and marry the Princess Theresa? He was bound more firmly than if his own word had been given—bound by the honor of the dead.

There was a deafening roar as the train pulled into the capital, and Roland was greeted with an enthusiasm so sincere that it touched and quieted him. Yet he felt that it was binding him with fetters that were harder to break than those of steel.

The Prince of Felzenbruck met him in person and escorted him through long rows of soldiers to the state coach. The city was in gala attire and in several shop windows, as they drove along, Roland caught a glimpse of lithographs of himself and the Princess Theresa. There had been a fatherly warmth in Friedrich's greeting, and now, as they rode side by side through the cheering multitude, Roland detected behind his reserve a kind of proprietary pride which he vaguely resented. He wondered what would happen if he should stab it with the truth. Gay and vivid as the city was, it seemed a blur to him.

When at length the coach followed the troop of horsemen through the huge pal-

ace gates and stopped before the main entrance, he became aware that the members of the cabinet and certain nobles of the court were waiting to welcome him. Behind them were some ladies-in-waiting, and in the center of the group Roland suddenly saw the slender little Princess with her piquant face and her fascinating, whimsical eyes. There was another shout and a waving of handkerchiefs as Roland advanced, and kneeling, kissed her hand.

XXV

• *The Brazilian Orchids*

AFTER the state luncheon, Roland was invited to review his own troop of hussars, and the remainder of the afternoon was so occupied with official duties and a public reception that he had no time for conversation with either Prince Friedrich or the Princess. Even when he did talk with them all mention of Zito was omitted. At the luncheon he noticed that Theresa wore a pendant of emeralds and diamonds, the colors of Altenburg. She thanked him for having sent it, and Roland was at a loss to account for its presence. Then it occurred to him that his minister to Felzenbruck had done the proper thing and provided a gift in the absence of one from the Prince himself.

It was after the long dinner that evening, as the men sat over their cigars, that

the question of the boundary dispute was first introduced, and then it was Roland himself who broached it. He was expressing his gratitude to Prince Friedrich for the warmth of his welcome, and the Prince had replied that the visit would do much to strengthen the friendship between the two peoples.

"We are already the best of friends," Roland replied, "and as I drove through that generous crowd to-day I wondered how there could ever have been a wrangle about boundaries."

"The commission could easily have settled it," Friedrich replied, "if you and I had been members. But you must not think of the matter at present. It will be simple enough to adjust, with the maps before us and our belligerent advisers safely locked up. I was young myself once," he added with a significant glance toward the door through which the women had gone. "You and Theresa must not allow affairs of state to interfere with your own more weighty consultations." The old Prince

chuckled so over his little joke that he failed to notice Roland's preoccupied manner, and later when the men went into the drawing-room he took the Prince by the arm and led him toward the Princess. She was the center of a group of young officers, who saluted and withdrew at the approach of the Prince of Felzenbruck.

"Theresa might show you my new orchids," he said, with a significant glance at Roland. "I have just received some fine specimens from Brazil, and the conservatory is very quiet."

"I should like to see them," Roland replied, as he looked somewhat helplessly after the Prince of Felzenbruck, already in retreat. There was a noticeable silence through the rooms as Roland offered his arm to the Princess Theresa, and together they walked slowly toward the conservatory. As they passed Lady Montague, the wife of the British minister, they could not help hearing her remark that they were made for each other.

Once in the conservatory, the Brazilian orchids were forgotten. Each was wondering what manner of person the other was and what the future years would mean. Roland wished himself well beyond an unpleasant interview, and Theresa, little Theresa, was fearful about the outcome. For a time neither spoke, and nothing broke the silence of the vast conservatory except the ripple of the miniature cascade before them. Roland cast a furtive glance at the girl beside him and met her eyes looking curiously at him. They laughed in genuine amusement.

"I feel as if we were very good friends, Roland," the Princess said. "We are almost strangers, but it seems as if I had known you always."

"I shall not abuse your trust," Roland replied gravely, and then with a little smile, "it would be strange if a man and a woman who are about to be married were not at least friendly."

"We were very young when we were

betrothed," the Princess went on, "and sometimes, you know, that sort of thing doesn't end happily. Cousin Hans, for instance, had never seen the Princess of Terse until a fortnight before they were married, and I suppose you know——"

"Yes, I know about them," Roland replied.

"That is what I mean about our being friends. We know each other better than most people who—I can't quite express it——"

"Better than most people who are—shall I say ordered to love one another? Is that what you mean?"

"Yes," she said and then quickly added, "you are not offended, are you?"

"Of course not," Roland answered. "I am glad that you can think of me as your friend. It's a very good basis to work on—friendship."

"Of course in our station we can't expect to love one another—that is, love the way we might some one whom we had seen much of and——"

"But later, after we have seen much of each other, love might come," said Roland.

"But if it took a long time, the woman might have grown old and unlovable. It would be dreary waiting."

"And the man might be unlovable, too," said Roland. And they again lapsed into silence.

Theresa rose with a sigh and threw a handful of crumpled rose leaves into the pool, smiling as the goldfish rose to the surface.

"They are happy," she said, "because they know nothing different. They have never been unfortunate enough to know freedom."

Roland looked at her in silence for a moment and the beauty of the picture gave him a thrill. The note in her voice had struck into his heart. It set him wondering. It made him realize suddenly how selfish he had been. His overwhelming self-pity had kept him from giving more than a passing thought to the little

Princess. He had been told that she was ready to do her father's bidding; he had thought of her as one who cared for nothing but the conventions of court life, to whom a marriage of convenience was but a part of the plan. Now she stood before him, a young woman of flesh and blood, one of more than ordinary beauty and grace, with unsuspected possibilities of tenderness and of misery, and for the first time his eyes were opened to the fact that she, too, had a heart of her own. Through the depths in her voice and the mists in her eyes he saw that their positions were identical: each had had just enough freedom to be able to estimate the value of the life at court. It was worse than he had feared. They were betrothed and yet she, too, carried some one else in her heart.

Princess Theresa turned away from the pool with a sigh and stood before Roland as if she had something to say. But she did not know how to begin. The Prince rose and took both her hands in his, look-

ing down into her eyes. At the touch of his hands she stepped back, but quickly recovering herself she returned the pressure of his fingers and looked up at him with a brave smile. The instinctive recoil and a fleeting look in her eyes told Roland more than she could have expressed in words. Before such courage as hers he felt himself to be a despicable coward.

"I shall try to be worthy of your friendship, little one," he said. "You are braver than any soldier I ever knew."

"I don't understand," she said quickly, turning crimson.

"It is I who have been blind," he answered. "I didn't know that you were different from the others. Come, let us face the matter squarely. Tell me."

There was so much of friendliness and sincerity in the man's voice that the Princess pressed his hand in grateful response and her eyes grew dim. "I am prepared to do my duty," she said, with a swing of the shoulders that made her look taller

than she was, "and you are ready to do yours."

"I am ready to devote my life to you," Roland replied.

"I believe you. I know I can trust you," searching his eyes rather wistfully. "But all the time you would be thinking of some one else."

Roland started to interrupt her, but she checked him. "You see I know all about you," she said with a queer, sad little smile. "If I could not see you I could hear of you, and you would be surprised at the extent of my knowledge."

Roland was bewildered. How could the Princess Theresa know of things which he had only confided to Karl von Meyer—things that he had even hesitated to think about because they seemed like treason?

"I hope the things you heard did not put me in such an impossible light?" Roland asked.

"On the contrary," the Princess continued, "the more I heard of you the bet-

ter I liked you. At first I had really hated you and conjured up all sorts of things that you might do. I rebelled many times at the thought of marrying you."

Here she hesitated as if she feared she had gone too far, and asked, "Oh, you'll forgive me, won't you? I didn't mean to speak that way, you know, and I can confide in you even——"

"Even if the confidence is against myself." He took her up quite positively.

"It was about that time that I met—that I came to know my cousin Albert. We had grown up together and even as little tots we played together, and quarreled, and made up, and were happy. He was older than I and when my betrothal to you was announced it made him wretched."

"And you?" asked Roland.

"I was no more than a child then. I didn't understand it all—at least it didn't occur to me that it would make any difference between Albert and me. As I grew

older I learned what I had done. I found myself pledged to a man I had hardly seen. I loathed the mention of your name. But when I rebelled they called me a child and sent me to the Convent of Ste. Marie for a whole winter. The sisters taught me the meaning of the word duty. It's a hard word to learn. Have you ever thought of it?" The corners of her mouth showed that it had not been easy, and Roland felt like kissing them into happiness. "When I came away," she went on, "it was with the determination to forget Albert and do as my father wished. But it meant suffering and unhappiness. They would not even allow Albert to write to me. He was made an attaché at St. Petersburg, and I tried to put him altogether out of my mind. But one day as I was walking in the garden alone, he suddenly appeared. He was home on leave and he had bribed the servants to let him into my part of the garden. I tried so hard to make him go away forever, but all the time my

heart was really crying to him to take me."

"Poor little child!" Roland said tenderly as she stopped, frightened at her courage.

"I thought I had put him out of my life, but when he appeared again I found it wasn't possible. You must have struggled in the same way."

It pulled Roland up to realize that she could think of his unhappiness while he had thought so little of hers. "Yes," he said, "I have struggled."

"And for you it is all the harder," the Princess went on. "Miss Barrington is of a different class, while Albert——"

"What do you know about Miss Barrington?" asked Roland in frank amazement.

"I told you I knew all about you," she laughed. "I have had a terrible curiosity about you, and your courage has given me courage. I knew that we were fighting the same fight, except that for you the sacrifice is greater."

Roland sank down on a bench and

buried his face in his hands. For once he thought first of her. "Why is it," he groaned, "that your life should be ruined for the sake of these politicians? It is not right. I cannot let you suffer like that."

A light came into Theresa's eyes. "Could it be arranged?" she asked. "Would it be too wicked if we should break it all off and follow our own hearts?"

"It must be arranged," Roland said decisively. "It would be wicked not to break it off. Nothing is worth while except happiness."

"I am almost beginning to love you," said Theresa, as she smiled through her tears.

XXVI

The Court of Last Appeal

IT WAS at the moment when Roland and the little Princess reached their friendly undersiding that they were interrupted by the entrance of Prince Friedrich, who was followed at a distance by several officers. He greeted them with his jovial laugh.

"I have come to interrupt your love-making," he said. "The merriment rather halts for want of your presence, cousin. If you will wind up the evening by leading Theresa through a quadrille, we can retire and allow our guests to go their way. I confess to a desire for a quiet chat with my children over the fire."

Friedrich's good humor was in striking contrast to Roland's anxiety, and it brought him sharply to a realization of the difficulties of the task he had accepted. He gave his arm to the Prin-

cess and followed Prince Friedrich into the brilliant salon. There was a flutter among the guests, for Roland's eccentric aloofness had made him a sufficiently romantic figure, but a set was quickly formed and the dance that followed had a beautiful, stately dignity. Opposite the little Princess was a stalwart, good-looking officer in cavalry uniform whom Roland recognized as Prince Albert of Bernitz, a second cousin of the sovereign. A kind of glowering somberness in him suddenly enlightened the Prince as to the identity of Theresa's "Cousin Albert." It seemed to make the way easier for him, as Albert was a man of rank and distinction and immensely popular with the people. Roland managed after the dance to find an opportunity to give the other his hand with a few words of such sincere friendliness that Prince Albert was surprised into a certain warmth.

It was not long before the royal hosts and their distinguished guest withdrew, leaving the others to dance and chatter

as they liked. Roland had made a distinctly favorable impression, and the talk was chiefly of him and the suspicion of mysterious adventures that had brought him there. A few of the wiser shook their heads over the approaching alliance, but the more popular opinion was that Roland would make his way with the little Princess as he had made it with others. There was a dominant magnetism in him which no one could escape. Prince Albert found himself easily bored by this talk and remembered a pressing engagement at his club. He had endured the ordeal bravely and those who had expected him to show his resentment more plainly were disappointed. He was so open and manly about it all, so frank in showing his admiration of Theresa, yet so considerate in his attitude toward her, that the sympathy of the court went out to him.

Prince Friedrich, meanwhile, had led "his children" into his private library and told them that now they must talk to

him. He was an old man, he said, but he loved youth and all that it meant and he did not intend to be shut out of their happiness. "It means everything to me," he added, "and you will not mind a sentimental old man, will you?"

No peasant's cottage could have presented a more domestic picture than this one before the massive fireplace in the library of the royal palace of Felzenbruck. Prince Friedrich had taken a comfortable armchair and at his feet on a low hassock was the Princess. Roland walked about the room for a time, and then, to the amusement of the others, threw himself on the bearskin rug before the hearth. Each was occupied with his own thoughts and it was some moments before a word was spoken. The crackling fire cast a rosy glow over the three figures before it. They had turned off the lights and except for the fire and an occasional flare from Prince Friedrich's long German pipe, the room was in darkness.

"I count on you, Roland," Prince Friedrich said at length, "to look after my little girl. I shall feel safe in leaving her with you."

"But you will be here to look after her yourself for many years to come," Roland protested.

"I hope so, I hope so," the older man said, softly stroking the girl's hair. "I would like to see her happiness and share in it."

"You are responsible for all my happiness, dearest," the little Princess said as she leaned her graceful head against her father's knee. "I have never told you so enough. It is so hard to say those things if one really means them. I am afraid I have disappointed you many times," turning her wistful gray eyes up to his, "but you were a dear. You said never a word. You were always as gentle as could be."

The old Prince continued to stroke her gleaming dark hair softly. He said nothing, but his eyes were moist.

"It makes me wretched to disappoint you again," she went on. "I don't know how I can do it. You know I wouldn't, don't you, if it didn't mean a very great deal to me?"

"My little girl," the old Prince said tenderly, "you have never disappointed me. You couldn't do it if you tried."

"Oh, but this time you won't say that." She laughed a little. "It's a heavy matter. Roland and I have been talking it over and we need your help."

"You may count on me," he answered. "I am for you every time."

"You dear!" she said. But she could not face it. She covered her face with her hands and cried a little quietly at his knee. "I am afraid," was all she could say.

Roland had watched her with a kind of fascinated sympathy. He felt almost that he was intruding upon something that he should not see, yet he accepted it hungrily. He had been silent. There was nothing that he could say. But now he took up the burden.

"We want your advice and help, Sire," he said. "And we shall follow it. We are ready—both of us—to carry out your plan if you think best. But it means the sacrifice of your daughter's happiness. If she cared for no one else, I think I could make her love me. It might not be so hard." He had risen and he looked down at the quivering little figure. "But there is some one else. Prince Albert of Bernitz has had better opportunities than I. She thinks too much of him to be happy with me."

"Oh, but that is not all, father dear," said Theresa, looking up with tearful eyes. "With Roland, too, there is some one else."

Friedrich drooped in his chair, wearily, all the animation gone from his face. It meant much to him, this project that he had dreamed over and worked for and built up. He hated to have it turn fruitless in his hands. All the joy was suddenly gone out of it. He looked at Theresa almost angrily, but she was so gentle and she knew so little what she

was doing. What children they were, he thought, what foolish children!

It was several moments before he spoke, and to Roland his silence was worse than vituperation.

"So this is the end of it all," he murmured finally, his chin upon his breast, his eyes upon the smoldering logs. "I thought I had built upon a rock. I thought you would love him, little girl, and I knew he could not know you a week without loving you. It seemed as though it would adjust everything and give you power and peace and happiness."

Theresa turned toward him pleadingly. "Don't take it that way, dearest," she said. "You break my heart."

He brushed her aside gently and rose to confront the young Prince. When he spoke to him his voice was stern. "This alliance means so much more than a silly love-affair," he said. "You should know that, cousin. You are unworthy of your inheritance if you can sacrifice its interests to a trivial sentiment."

"I am sacrificing its interests," Roland retorted, "to secure your daughter's happiness—and my own," he added honestly, "which is not worth considering. I should be unworthy of my inheritance if I could immolate a woman."

"There is no question of that," he answered with a touch of contempt, "it is a schoolgirl's fancy. You could cure her of it in a week."

"Father," broke in Theresa, "you don't know what you are saying. I can't give up Albert. It would be too miserable. It means everything to me. You would not have me sad all my life, would you, father?"

There was something in her voice as she uttered the word that unnerved the old Prince. He visibly weakened. But he waited in silence for Roland's reply.

"You ask too much of my vanity, Sire," he said, ignoring the little Princess. "I have seen Prince Albert and he is not unworthy. I doubt if I could cure her so easily. But I am ready to try." He

looked down at her as she sat there pathetically relaxed, and added, "It would be a pleasure to try."

The word he used was not one to appeal to Theresa. She could not be silent under it. "Father, dear," she said, "don't you see what you are doing? You will not give me to a man who is thinking all the time of some one else. He would have married me without a word if I had not guessed the story. I accused him of it and he finally admitted it. He can't help it, dearest. I know, because I have tried so hard to forget Albert."

She was kneeling on the stool now with her hands on her father's arm, and he leaned down and kissed her on the forehead. "Little girl," he said, "you don't know about these things. Roland could make you happy."

But little Theresa had a will of her own and she knew what she wanted. "Dearest," she pleaded, "do you remember the stories you have told me about my mother? Do you think you could have

forgotten her all of a sudden just because it was wise?" She threw all her affection into the smile she gave him.

"My little Theresa," he said somberly, "what an imp you are! You would have your way if nations went to pieces. You could bully your old father out of his last penny and his pet ambition. I see you are going to do what you like. But it was for you, Theresa, that I planned it all." His voice broke. "I hate to give it up."

The little Princess looked very grave. Having gained her point, she knew where to place the responsibility. She rose with graceful dignity, took the hand of the old Prince in both of hers and kissed it solemnly. "Sire," she said in a new voice, "you are wise. You know what is best. I shall do whatever you command."

Roland chuckled inwardly, but the old Prince took his daughter in his arms and turned to him with the half-broken words, "I cannot have my little girl unhappy."

XXVII

Problems

IT WAS with complex emotions that Roland retired at last to his own apartments. His exultation had something of melancholy in it, his happiness a tinge of envy. But a letter in a handwriting he had seen but twice was given him and drove every thought from his mind. He read it in a daze, stunned by the words, "We are returning to America. We sail from Cherbourg in three days." It was only after a second reading that he comprehended that it contained anything else. It was too incredible that she could desert him at such a crisis, after all they had been through together, after all that he had dreamed and sacrificed.

"I hate to go," Miss Barrington wrote, "without saying good-bye, but it seems the best way. It may make things

easier for you. And for me no words could express my gratitude to your royal highness, so why should I stay?" There were some conventional good wishes for him and the Princess Theresa, which he hurried over. It was all stiff enough, yet it was not without warmth underneath, and he thought he detected a certain regret. The thing that caught at his throat was the statement that Stanley Lockwood would meet them at Cherbourg.

Roland himself could not leave Felzenbruck for another day at least. Too much was at stake to permit the scanty courtesy of a hasty farewell. Yet it was evident that something must be done and quickly. Miss Barrington would not leave Oberholtz until the next evening. After a moment's thought he sat down and wrote to her, begging her with some formality to postpone her departure until after the drawing-room which would be held four days later. Steamers had been missed in the past, he said, why not now?

He made the wish sufficiently emphatic to be a kind of command and he hoped that she was familiar enough with the etiquette of the occasion to take it in that way. He was desperate. He did not care how he kept her—only that she should stay.

When the note was sealed he wrote a telegram of instructions to Colonel von Meyer, but in neither message was the little Princess mentioned. He knew well that the sensational news of her betrothal would spread through Altenburg only too swiftly. Summoning Hugo, he gave him instructions about taking the train for Oberholtz at four in the morning and delivering the note to Miss Barrington in person.

It was but little sleep that the restless Prince secured that night. He rose early, wishing himself far on the road to Oberholtz with his political mission well over. The task of dealing with it was distasteful. There was only one thing that he wanted to do, and delay was irk-

some. After an aimless stroll in the palace gardens, which was not without its pang of regret that the little Princess had so quickly forgotten him, he summoned the minister from Altenburg in consultation. To him he related the story of the change in his fortunes and asked what effect the nullification of the betrothal would have upon the people of Felzenbruck.

Accustomed as he was to conceal his emotions, the minister could not quite avoid betraying his surprise. But he gathered himself together quickly and rose to the question. "If the Princess is happy," he said, "they will accept the disappointment. They adore her, Sire. The feeling for her is much what it is in Altenburg for your royal highness." He stopped and laughed a little. "Then, too, they love a romance."

"It will not affect then, you think, the present friendly disposition toward myself?"

"On the contrary, Sire, since it is not

possible for them to suspect an affront to Princess Theresa, it is a good stroke of diplomacy. It will make them forget the boundary dispute, and you can do what you like behind their backs."

It was a brief paragraph in the Court Gazette, printed at noon, which announced to the world that the betrothal of Princess Theresa of Felzenbruck and Prince Roland of Altenburg had been annulled. In another column of the same paper Prince Friedrich made known the engagement of his daughter and Prince Albert of Bernitz. It was the chief topic of conversation in the cafés and in the streets, but Prince Friedrich adroitly planned a drive in the park to discount the gossip. "The rejected," as Roland was called, was seen to be on such good terms with the little Princess and her stalwart Prince that the true cause of the breaking of the engagement was accepted as the only explanation. In such matters secrecy does not pay, Prince Friedrich had said; if the people are not given the

truth they will manufacture lies to take its place.

The old Prince was elated at the success of his coup, and it required no effort to show the best of good spirits to the crowd during the drive. Prince Albert's devotion flamed out in his eyes now and then, and little Theresa's bubbling happiness was compensation enough to her father and to his subjects for any change of bill. It made him particularly jovial, and at luncheon after the drive he could not resist the opportunity the situation gave him for chaffing. The fickleness of his young people formed the theme of a humorous homily that had a certain foundation of seriousness, and Prince Albert was warned more than once with much shaking of the head against the inconstancy of his fiancée.

"In my day," he said with a half smile, "we had never heard of falling in love. A marriage of convenience was the only kind."

"Perhaps," said the little Princess, tilt-

ing up her chin at him, "you do not realize what a very inconvenient one Roland's and mine would have been. Suppose we had not found out until after marriage that we each loved some one else. Wouldn't you call that inconvenient?"

A little laugh went round the table and Prince Friedrich took her up. "But that is all out of character," he retorted. "You forget that you were born a princess. You are not supposed to have a mind of your own in such matters. Don't you remember how docile my cousin Randolph was about marrying the Servian princess he had never seen? There is an example for you."

"He had really never seen her at all until the hour of the nuptials?" asked the little Princess.

"No, the dynasty down there was in danger of being overthrown, and it was thought that an alliance with Felzenbruck would frighten off the revolutionary party."

"But they could not have been happy," put in Theresa.

"Not at first, perhaps," admitted her father. "Possibly not until after the revolution. It broke out two weeks after the marriage."

"And did that bring them together?" she asked.

"I hope so. If not, nothing else could do it. They were assassinated," he added with grim seriousness, "in the royal palace."

"O father," exclaimed the startled little Princess, "how gruesome! I did not dream you were leading up to that." And then more gayly, "Think, Roland, what a fate we have escaped."

"Oh, I don't know," he answered thoughtfully, "it might have its compensations. A blaze of glory and you, Theresa, in the midst of it. It would be something."

"That is not the kind of glory I am clamoring for," she laughed. "I want something more tangible, something I

can have a little fun with myself. The glory that one dies to achieve is pretty, but you cannot call it satisfying."

"There you are again, little girl," broke in Prince Friedrich, "always wanting to be satisfied. I never saw anything so unreasonable or so unprincely. Even in marrying you have your preferences."

Roland laughed. "She comes honestly by it, Sire, if I am not mistaken," he said. "Your own marriage, I have been led to believe, was not one of convenience."

"No, it was not," Friedrich said with decision. "But I narrowly missed being bestowed upon a Portuguese Princess."

"When you rebelled and married my gentle little mother," Theresa said.

"You couldn't blame me if you had ever seen the Princess," Friedrich answered with a laugh. "She lives in Paris now—exiled—and you may see her any fine day sitting at a café in the Bois sipping absinthe and smoking a huge black cigar."

"You are cruel, Sire," Roland said gravely. "It was the loss of you that

drove her to these excesses." And Prince Friedrich laughed with the rest.

"There is one thing, Roland," he said after a moment, "for which you ought to make reparation. Those wonderful lithographs of the happy couple are a dead loss to the shop-keepers. They paid real money for them."

"It serves them right," the Princess said in much indignation. "Neither one of us ever looked like them."

"A capital idea," Friedrich exclaimed. "They can substitute Albert's name for Roland's, and no one will know the difference. The portrait looks as unlike one as the other."

As the little company rose from the table, Prince Friedrich said to Theresa with a twinkle in his eye, "You might show Albert the new Brazilian orchids. The conservatory is quiet, you know. But don't let the orchids have the same effect upon you as when you showed them to Roland. You cannot get out of this alliance."

Theresa laughingly led the way to the conservatory, and Roland accompanied Prince Friedrich into the library. The boundary question became the order of the day. The danger that the subject might be associated with the breaking of the royal engagement made it essential that an agreement be announced immediately. For two hours they pored over maps and consulted with the ministers. The original allotment of the boundary had been made three centuries before, but gradually both nations had overstepped their lines. Now in place of an almost straight line to mark the division, the boundary had shifted as much as twenty miles in some places and formed a zigzag trail. The mineral wealth extended along these lines, but in one place Felzenbruck capitalists had developed mines which were actually on Altenburg soil, and Roland's radical party had forced a demand that the lands should be surrendered. This case was typical of others, and both countries had much at stake.

Roland argued his case forcefully, but with a tact that won over the older ruler almost too easily. Friedrich was in a particularly genial mood, and he had seen enough of men and the world to be generous. Roland pointed out the need of returning to the original lines and suggested that a new survey be made. It would then be possible to determine the identity of the transgressors. He further offered to protect any Felzenbruck property that might lie on his side of the line if Prince Friedrich would do the same for Altenburg. As far as the individual wealth was concerned, each mine owner would be unaffected except that he would pay taxes in the country in which his plant actually existed. The scheme seemed equitable to Prince Friedrich, who with characteristic warmheartedness overlooked the fact that the most valuable mines would belong to Altenburg.

A formal basis of settlement was drawn up and signed by the two rulers. The survey was to be undertaken by a joint

commission, and by its decision each nation agreed to stand. The temporary agreement was signed in the presence of Friedrich's cabinet and the minister of Altenburg. The settlement, although a perfectly fair one, was a triumph for Roland, and the ease and graciousness with which Prince Friedrich adopted his suggestions made him feel that he was not without a talent for diplomacy.

XXVIII

The Return

EVEN Roland's impatience could not force a retreat before the next morning, but he bore the restraint gracefully. Having gained his point in more than one direction, he could afford to be generous. Tea in the sunny library with the little Princess and some of the ladies of the court followed the settlement of the boundary dispute. In some subtle way, here as elsewhere, Roland felt that his popularity was increased by the new turn of affairs where he had expected it to be diminished. Evidently anything which contributed to the happiness of the little Princess, who was passionately loved, satisfied the court as well as the people. At the banquet, which wound up the day, he was made the lion of the occasion, and the liking shown for him by Theresa was

reflected in her guests. He toasted her in a swift little speech which had enough warmth in it to enflame their admiration. It pleased him—this enthusiasm—but the thing that pleased him most was a word or two with the little Princess herself at the end of the evening. She drew him aside and they sat down together, with the music and the flutter and the gayety beyond them. He wore the full dress uniform of the Felzenbruck hussars, and she, her dark hair coiled low in the neck, was in white that gleamed and shimmered.

"I shall not see you in the morning, Roland," she said, "so I must tell you now that it is good to know you. I hope this is only the beginning of our friendship."

"It is the beginning of something that will be very precious to me, little cousin," he answered. "I am glad that it was in my power to give you what you want. I am glad you were brave enough to tell me your story."

"Do you really call it brave? There

were times when I thought it cowardly."

Roland looked at her with a certain curiosity. "It would be pretty hard," he said gently, "for you to be a coward."

"Hard!" she exclaimed with a laugh, "you have no idea how easy it is. But, Roland," she added more seriously, "you will need courage. It will not be very simple for you even now."

There was a lovely sympathy in her eyes and he leaned forward to take it all in.

"No," he answered gravely, "it will not be simple. But you have shown me the way. By your help I mean to win out." He gave a careless laugh. "You see you can't escape an alliance with me. Fate will have its way."

"And this time we help it along," she agreed. "It's queer how much pleasanter a thing like that is if we begin it ourselves."

"Yes," Roland laughed, "if our blundering relations had left us alone per-

haps things would have happened differently."

She smiled a whimsical smile. "But then," she said softly, "there was always Albert."

"Yes," and he laughed again. "I forgot. There was always Albert."

"There always is some one else, isn't there?" she said with a quaint distress. "You know there was with you."

"Yes," he repeated, "there was with me."

"But aren't you glad?" she asked eagerly.

"Things are desperately uncertain for me, Theresa," he answered. "I am not even sure that she cares."

The little Princess gave an exclamation of distress, though her dismay lasted only for a moment. "But you are sure," she contradicted him gayly, "you must be sure. I know perfectly well that she cares."

"Well, if she does——" He stopped abruptly. "Wish me luck, little cousin."

"The very best!" There was a warmth

in her voice that he liked. "You may count on me."

"I do count on you, Theresa. You are a thoroughbred."

She laughed and rose. "I'll not forget that, Roland. We have formed an alliance, haven't we? It is a strong one—the strongest kind. And now we'll go back to Albert."

"Do you know there is something about Albert that I rather like?" said Roland.

It was at ten the next morning that Prince Roland's special left for Oberholtz. Prince Friedrich and Albert of Bernitz accompanied him to the station, and the expressions of good-will with which they parted were by no means perfunctory. Along the route crowds were assembled to see him again, and to Roland their cheers seemed as lusty as when he arrived. The open admiration of the populace assembled at the station made his progress to the train slow and somewhat difficult. But after they were seated in the car and just before it pulled

out, Roland looked at his successful rival rather quizzically.

"I've been pretty good to you, Albert," he said. "You don't deserve it, of course, but if you make her think you do I shall not be sorry."

Prince Albert's reply lay in a look, but it was eloquent.

It was hard to say good-bye to the new friends, and the warmth of their parting lingered in his heart far on the road to Altenburg. Yet it did not make the journey less tedious to his restless impatience. He chafed at every stop, and when the Altenburg line was finally crossed, he could hardly answer courteously the applause of the jubilant crowds at the towns along the route.

At the capital there was a great demonstration in honor of the young ruler. Roland rather wondered at it until von Becker whispered to him that he had done the most popular thing possible in upholding the dignity of Altenburg in a controversy with a stronger nation. The

desired alliance was forgotten in this triumph. So it was through cheering crowds that Prince Roland drove in state with his brilliant escort of troops to Castle Rheinwald.

XXIX

A State Dinner

IT SEEMED good to Prince Roland to be at home again, and he made the fatigue of the journey an excuse to retire to his own apartments. Then at last he could allow the thought of the one face that had not been a part of his welcome to have its way with him. He could not rest without seeing Katherine at once, yet to arrange it was not a simple matter. Anything he might do would be the subject of comment. But he did not care; things had gone too far for that. He remembered that an opportunity might be found in the state dinner which some one had told him had been arranged for that night. Summoning the grand chamberlain, he learned that it was a small one of not more than forty covers, but planned, as a welcome to the ruler to include the

most distinguished men and women at the capital.

"You will increase the number by six, my lord," said Roland. "Send cards at once to Mrs. Gerard, Miss Barrington and Miss Rand at the Grand Hotel. As for the men, ask whom you like. You will know best what is fitting."

The dinner was at nine and it was already six, so the lord chamberlain retired somewhat hurriedly to obey his master's startling command.

Von Meyer was sent for and Roland learned for the first time the story of the runaway escape. It was simple enough. One of the horses, shot in the skirmish, had fallen a quarter of a mile across the boundary, but the pace had grown slower and no one was injured. At the expense of a three-mile walk to the nearest village, they had taken the train to the capital. Once there, proceedings were immediately instituted for Roland's release from Stanek. Von Meyer had been afraid of some trick on Zito's part, so

they were rushed to a conclusion. It was only when the Colonel spoke of Zito that Roland remembered that not once at the court of Felzenbruck had his name been mentioned. Prince Friedrich, with royal courtesy, had demanded no explanation of Roland's presence at Stanek, and none had been given. To von Meyer, however, he told the story of his adventures with a whimsical appreciation of their grim humor.

It was only after they were ended, when the question of Theresa's marriage came up, that von Meyer told Roland of another broken engagement. From Mrs. Gerard he had learned that Stanley Lockwood had sailed for America. She confessed that she had dismissed him at the request of her niece immediately after the escape from Stanek. She had long felt that the time was bound to come when Katherine would find him out. To Roland this news was welcome, but it made him realize how little Lockwood had counted with him, how slight a part this engagement had played in his plans.

It was time to dress for dinner when the conference ended, and Roland prepared to receive his guests in some state. They were assembled in the long drawing-room when he entered, but his eyes instantly found Katherine Barrington where she stood tall and radiant. She flushed, he noticed, as he made his way slowly toward her, stopping to speak to certain officers and members of the cabinet who seemed to demand his attention. Afterward he wondered what he could have said to them, for there was nothing in his mind except this slender thing in yellow, outlined against the crimson hangings. He felt as though they were alone—as though he had made his way to her through obstacles and terrors, as though he had been fighting to come out with her upon this serenity.

When he greeted her at last there seemed to be nothing to say. For a moment they stood silent, unconscious of the crowd around them, feeling only a wonderful content. Then the world broke

upon them again, and the woman felt it first.

"I owe you too much," she said, "for thanks. You will believe that I feel it."

"You owe me nothing," he replied with quick emphasis. "I could not pay you for what you have given me in a million years, not if I worked always for nothing else, not if I should lay everything at your feet."

The moment was tense. She laughed to keep her lip from quivering. "It is you who have always done things," she said, her eyes bright, her mouth a little troubled. "I have passively allowed you to risk your life and more than your life. You gave me no choice."

"No," he said gravely, "I gave you no choice." He laughed a little, but there was something very serious behind it. "I do not mean to give you any choice."

Before she could answer, the lord chamberlain was at his elbow, and he was obliged to give his arm to the dowager Duchess of Pletz, who was a guest at

court. They led the way into the banquet-hall, and the others followed in a glittering procession. When they were seated Roland found himself separated by a long distance and many orchids from the one woman he cared to watch. It was only with an effort that he could see her red-gold hair through the sprays of lavender and green. He found it difficult to do his duty by his guests. He drifted into dangerous silences, from which he roused himself reluctantly. It was necessary, he realized at last, to pull himself together and take command. And when he once reached this decision he did it effectively, even brilliantly. To him the long dinner passed off slowly, but to some of the others he made it swift and charming. Prince Roland had a courtly courtesy about him at times, and he brought it to bear now upon the Duchess of Pletz—so effectively that he found in after days that he had gained a valuable adherent.

When the dinner was over and the men

were left to their coffee and cigars, Roland easily held the mastery. Politics in America came up for discussion, and his knowledge of the country enabled him to throw some side-lights upon the information of the diplomats. But the discussion, lively as it was, did not last long. At the earliest possible moment the Prince gave the signal to join the ladies. He led the way into the music-room where they were assembled, and with von Becker at his elbow advanced precipitately upon Katherine where she sat talking with the Duchess of Pletz. It was a simple manœuvre for Roland to appropriate the attention of the girl and swing his aide aside into position before the dowager.

"There is a new Monet," he said to her, "in the long gallery. Would you like to see it?" He smiled a little, remembering Prince Friedrich's Brazilian orchids, which he had never seen.

There were several others in the long gallery when they entered, but in the recess where the shimmering Monet was

hung they were alone. He seated her on the green divan and stood watching her while she looked at the painting. Yet he felt that it was not of its blues and purples that she was conscious.

"It is very lovely," she said at last, but she flushed as she said it.

"Katherine, do you know what I want you to do?"

His voice was tense and he had not before called her by her name. She looked up at him quickly and her breath caught in her throat.

"I want you to be my wife," he went on. "There is nothing but that for me in the world. Could you do it? Is it asking too much?"

The happy little laugh that she gave showed that she had forgotten everything but the one thing. "I almost think I could do it," she said in a quick impulse. "Would you really be glad?"

"Glad!" He said only that, but it was enough. She was satisfied. Yet it was only an instant before it all swept over

her in a flood—who he was, what it meant, all the miserable difficulties. He saw it coming and put out his hand to help her as if she were drowning. She looked up with eyes that were saddened, and when she spoke there was a strange new note in her voice.

"If you were different, if you were really Donald Scott," she said. He would have interrupted her, but she stopped him hurriedly. "But as it is, it is too impossible. They would fight it, Roland, and they have a right to fight it. I cannot let you face it."

The name had slipped from her unconsciously, and it made his eyes gleam. But it was very gravely that he replied to her. "I mean to face it," he said slowly. "If you love me it will be nothing. I shall not feel it."

"It would be revolutionary," she protested. "It would not be permitted."

"It would ignore tradition certainly," he answered. "But I know what I can do with my cabinet and with this court."

"It would make you unpopular with the people," she persisted. "And you could not do for them what you have planned."

He laughed with a new gayety. "We'll carry it through in a blaze of glory. We'll make it the most popular romance of the day."

"It would be throwing away your opportunities," she answered.

Roland realized that she was arguing against herself. He sat down beside her on the divan. "Do you love me, Katherine?" he asked very softly.

She ignored the question. "It would mean restrictions and compromises," she protested again.

"Do you love me, Katherine?" he repeated.

"They would look down upon you," she said with a lift of the chin, "and because of me. I could not endure that."

"Katherine, do you really think that all this counts?" he replied, and his voice was very gentle. "Do these little things mean anything to you in comparison with the

great thing? If you love me, that is the whole matter. I am not afraid of the rest."

Her deep eyes were misty as he looked into them. "How can I tell?" she said with a pathetic droop of the lips. "Perhaps it's the glamour of your name and position. Perhaps it will not last."

He laughed exultantly. "I mean to make it last," he said. "I mean to surround you with the glamour. You shall never discover your mistake. Don't you see, child," he added more seriously, "that there is no other way? Haven't you felt it really from the very first? Give me a word, Katherine. Tell me that you have."

She smiled with trembling lips. "How do I know what I have felt? I feel now——" She paused and her eyes were wonderful. "Oh, just as if no one could ever have felt anything before."

"So much as that?" said Roland. There was something almost reverential in his voice. His eyes were upon her, but he

did not move. "Katherine," he said quietly, "I could kiss you for that."

At this she laughed and it broke the tension. "But you won't," she said, looking out for the first time into the gallery. "Here, with the Duchess of Pletz pretending to admire the pictures while she watches you, and Count von Becker warily turning his back, and the lord chamberlain hovering anxiously—wouldn't it make a pleasant little ripple?" She laughed again. It was very easy to laugh. "Come, we must go back to them. We have prepared them—more than we thought, perhaps—for our sensation." She rose and held out her hand as he rose, too. Standing with her back to the others and with her radiant face to him, she had one more word. "Roland, it means just you and me against the world—for always."

THE END

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